

THE
SENTINEL OF THE EAST
A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY
OF
RABINDRA NATH TAGORE

By
DURLAB SINGH

Foreword:
SIR P. C. RAY

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SENTINEL OF THE EA

To

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu

The illustrious lady Poet of India.

FOREWORD

Rabindranath is no more. The great son of Mother India has secured a loving admiration in the minds of his countrymen and the world had bowed down to this great Indian Savant. Rabindranath's name is a household topic among the intelligentsia of our land and undoubtedly there is need for such books that give in a nutshell the life story of the philosopher poet.

Rabindranath was a versatile genius and in every sphere of activity he has left his imperishable stamp of genius. His contributions in literature, in the national awakening, in the cultural advance of the Indians cannot fully be dealt with in such a short book but surely it is a nice attempt. In the following pages Durlab Singh has attempted to give his readers a general introduction to the life of the poet.

I shall like to see the book widely circulated in India.

Calcutta :
November 15, 1941.

P. C. Ray (Sir)

विचार और समस्यायें

PREFACE

The dictum of the seers of ancient Asia that whenever the darkness of sins clouded the horizon and forces of tyranny gained the upperhand; whenever devil become supreme in the heart of men and aggressors began to build the edifices of their mad ambitions on the human skeletons, there always appeared some sage, poet, prophet or a leader to guide distressed humanity into the light of peace, freedom and love, is not a mere fiction but a well established truth. From the very beginning have been appearing men in one part of the world or the other with high moral character, courage and self-sacrifice, who reckoned their personal pleasures as nothing and in a mood of utter renunciation devoted themselves to the cause of humanity.

The last century has been such a renaissance in the person of Rabindranath Tagore, the Poet Laureate of India. The eighty years' chronicle of his life is one long struggle against racial arrogance and greedy grabbing of wealth which on grounds of culture or for economical reasons, separates the people of the world and ultimately brings man against man. His attempt on the other hand had always been to create feelings of amity and good will where hatred and animosity existed. His was the gospel of peace, freedom, love and truth and the message of his life was that the power of the spirit is the sole guiding light in the darkness of life.

The tributes paid to him in his life-time or afterwards are varied and befitting indeed. "You are the reason why India should be free" said Will Durrant to him once; "Rabindranath's genius has set the seal of India's right for freedom," writes Ramanand Chattetjee about him and that he was the "Sentinel of the East" is the tribute of Gandhiji, to the poet. He was pre-eminently fitted to be remembered with any good name no doubt but the unique excellence with which he has upheld the dignity and guarded the interests of the East has truly won for him the title with which Gandhiji complimented him. Hence the name of the book.

Just as a sky lark soars high in the sky and leaves no material print behind except that the world remembers the story of its flight and the sweet music of its voice; similarly a poet does not leave behind any mark of victory, accumulated wealth or conquered territories but soars higher and higher into the heavens of sublimity, completely divorced from material fascinations and what remains for mankind is to know and admire the sweetness of the voice he spoke, the surroundings in which he was born and brought up, the things from which he got his inspiration and the philosophy and teachings of the life he led.

An attempt is made in the following pages to reveal a similar account of India's great poet, patriot, seer and leader. As to its literary value, I may not claim to have placed a piece of literary merit before the readers but I can say it with confidence that in the

विचार और सत्यार्थ

absence of any popular biography which might suit the taste and pockets of Indian readers, this book may serve to stand as a humble monument of the manifold activities and the philosophy of life of a really great man.

My respectful thanks are due to Acharya Sir P. C. Ray, doubtlessly the greatest Bengali of the present day for his having written the Foreword to the book and to Bhishamji and Mr. H. L. Kumar of Rawalpindi for their kind assistance in bringing the book to a successful end. The invaluable co-operation of S. Sawan Singh, Accountant, M/s. Jai Dyal Kapur & Co. is yet to be acknowledged. The noble soul, I don't know what a selfless heart God has given him. He has taken more pains than the author and the publishers themselves in getting the book published without even the remotest of personal interest. Along with him I must thank his young boss also—Anand Babu as he is popularly known and so also Mr. F. C. Kapur of the Allied Press for the magnanimity of heart shown by them.

And last and by no means the least I thank all those friends whose good wishes I have carried all the time with me.

Lahore :
31st Oct. 1941.

DURLAB SINGH

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By the same Author
The Rebel President
(Second Edition)

"I have got my leave Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure. Here I give back the keys of my door—and I give up all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind word from you. We were neighbours for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey."

CHAPTER I

FORTUNATE BIRTH

GLOWING tributes paid to Dr. Rabindranath Tagore in his life time or after by the most distinguished people of the world, lead one to confusion as to who he was. To an Indian commoner he was the greatest patriot and a national poet who had, during the last four or five decades not only awakened in his countrymen, educated or uneducated, the desire to live like a free nation but the feeling that it is their inherent right to do so. To the people of wider vision he was much greater than a patriot or a national poet. He was not merely an inspiring leader, a renowned philosopher, a talented artist, a great sage but a towering cosmopolitan and a divine prophet who brought to the whole world an eternal message of peace, freedom and love.

It was, however, primarily the heavenly gift of poetry in him which brought him into the limelights of honour and distinction with such great rapidity. His great power of thinking, his deep interest in music and his profound love for the beauties of nature held him as one of the greatest poets of

the modern times. He was not only possessed of great power of vision but was also blessed with the keen sensitiveness to all the manifestations of life. He could enter into the hearts of the surrounding objects and reveal their beauty, their truth and their beneficence through his immortal verses. His songs are a living monument of his deep patriotism, prophetic vision and sublime spiritualism and there is scarcely any cultivated language into which some of them, at least have not been translated.

To study his personality, it must be noted that Rabindranath seemed to have a communion with nature from the very birth. The story of his life brings to light such factors which induce us to believe that at every step the secret bond of nature exerted itself to create homogeneous atmosphere so often necessary for the creation of poetry. He was a versatile genius no doubt but geniuses unless they are favourably circumstanced generally fail to prove their worth in the world.

A careful study of common life would reveal that there is no lack of persons in the world who are geniuses in the real sense of the word but born in "indigence they cannot rise above the daily calls of life." They have neither opportunities nor favourable circumstances, essentially required to climb the ladder of success.

In our country the foreign domination has made the conditions all the worse.

"Many hundreds of years before," according to a British writer, "the nations of India had been a collection of wealthy and highly civilized peoples, possessed of a great language, with an elaborate code of laws and social regulations, with exquisite artistic taste in architecture and decoration, having beautiful manufactures of all kinds, and endowed with religious ideas and philosophic and scientific conceptions which have greatly influenced the development of the most progressive races of the West."

But the economic drain in the country for the last two hundred years has absolutely changed this definition of India

Most of the children, howsoever intelligent they may be, from the very infancy are forced to go out to earn their livelihood since their paltry share in the income of the family is a much needed thing. There is equally an alarming number of youngmen in this unhappy land, who are God-gifted indeed but born in poverty are compelled to work as luggage-carriers on the decks, on the railway stations or to break stones on the road-side since the hunger of their families demands it. Nobody can dare deny that if India were a free country or facilities were allowed to the intelligent people from their very childhood several Tagores, Gandhis and Nehrus would appear to dispel the charm of the civilized world. But the drawback is that as a result of

costly foreign administration Indians have very limited chances to live and grow and in most of the cases in the words of the poet himself they lose their original value and find themselves "truly helpless." In such conditions not only are their aspirations strangled, even the minimum most requirement of every human being, that of literacy, is denied to them.

Rabindranath was gifted with all the opportunities essential for greatness. It is generally believed in the Indian homes "that the goddess of Learning and Good Fortune, *Saraswati* and *Lakshmi*, do not live together." Yet an exception must be admitted in the case of the Tagores. Of wealth there was no want in the family because he belonged to the family of well-known landed proprietors in Bengal who pay a good deal of land revenue to the Government. So the greatest obstacle that checks the growth of mental and moral development was not to be found in his way.

Besides the material self-sufficiency he also inherited great intellectual and literary tendencies from his forefathers.

Even in the 17th century when bad days were on their way to overwhelm India, this family was esteemed with the word '*Thakur*' before its name. This word does not find popular place in Bengal these days but big land lords in U. P. and C. P. are even now distinguished with the word

Thakur. These *Thakurs* of Bengal who were later on known as Tagores were great connoisseurs of art and literature. In all the reformist movements that were started in their time they always took leading part.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the great reformer of the nineteenth century, who has to his credit the title of "the Father of Modern India" found a great supporter in the Tagore family. After attaining a respectable place in the Government and obtaining success in bringing Western Education to the country he thought of removing the old customs and rituals, which he thought had been the cause of the decline of Hinduism. He was strongly opposed to idol-worship. He therefore started a new sect in the Hinduism known as Brahmosamaj. Rabindranath's grand father Prince Dwarkanath who was the most venerable and widely respected Brahmin of his age lent his whole hearted support to Raja Roy as a result of which Brahmosamaj came to be popularised as an all India faith. The removal of the *Sati* system from the country also goes to the credit of these two great reformers who made repeated joint representations to Lord William Bentinck and induced him at last to forbid Bengali widows to sacrifice themselves with the dead bodies of their husbands on the funeral pyres. It was a family of God-fearing people endowed with wonderful gifts of talent and love for art and literature

and were very widely respected in Bengal. In spite of his magnificent wealth, his father Devindernath did not have much love for materialism. He or any one from his family enjoyed no exaggerated luxury but led a very simple life. He devoted his energy, income and intellect more to the social welfare than to his personal use, as a result of which he very soon began to be regarded as the most disinterested reformer of Social evils.

Reformers, who come forward with the idea of bringing revolution in a society have often to chew very hard stones. If their movements are calculated to do any harm to the existing government, prisons and sometimes gallows are their lot. But if they attempt towards a change in the existing orthodoxy the punishments of the society are none the less severe. Swami Dayanand attempted towards it, although he was successful in his later years yet in the beginning the people saw him showered with brick bats, and stones, in the streets of Amritsar. King Aman Ullah Khan in Afghanistan, notwithstanding all the Imperial powers that he possessed, when he tried a sudden reformation in his people, he found that the Great Afghan Empire was swept away from his possession by a process which he could never withstand. Similarly Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Tagore elders tasted the wrath of society.

They were formidably opposed to the existing

orthodoxy in the Hindu society and to give a practical shape to their views they were supposed to have once taken meals with the Mussalmans. Similarly they broke several other social barriers prevalent in those days among the Hindus. To cross the oceans and to go abroad was looked down upon with contempt by the Hindus and especially the Brahmins of those days and if ever any progressive family tried to send any of its member to the West such an offence cost them their place in the society. Devidernath Tagore, the father of the poet, notwithstanding the existing interdictions in the Brahmin Community, in his strong zeal for learning undertook a sea voyage to England. Obviously it was not with any ill intention that they broke these taboos, nevertheless the Hindu society took them to a severe task. Orthodox Brahmins refused to intermarry with their family and the Tagores began to be "looked down upon with a certain contempt as *pirilis*."

The poet's father was the leader of Brahmosamaj and was a very wise and sane person. He at once understood the serious consequences that such a continued isolation from the society was expected to result. He therefore became less hostile to orthodoxy and with his most impressive personality began to influence the people towards his ideals. The result was that the very people who were unwilling to mix with him, with a united decision

conferred on him the title of Maharishi*—an honour which came to the lot of very few in the country.

Rabindranath has been a many sided genius and the reputation and eminence which came to the lot of his family during the last century is perhaps unrivalled and quite unique. Not only were his parents most widely respected throughout the country but his brothers also were famous for their intellectual excellence. Although the fame and honours that he himself attained during his life, not a hundredth part of it was bestowed on any one of them yet the younger Tagores very rightly picked up the intellectual thread of their elders.

He was the youngest but the most intelligent of the seven sons of Maharishi Devindernath. One of his brothers was the first Indian to be taken in the Civil Service, another was a famous philosopher and a great essayist of his time and yet another was a well known artist with a wonderful inventive brain. "So that Rabindranath, from his earliest days, grew up in the one house where all the surging tides of Indian Renaissance might flow round his daily life, and fill the air he breathed with the exhilaration of their fresh airs."

He was born on may, 6, 1861 at 6, Dwarka Das Tagore lane, Jorasanko House, Calcutta.

Maharishi means a great sage. In those peaceful days when the foreign invaders had not as yet made their entry into this glorious land this title was conferred on those selfless reformers and saints who devoted the greater period of their lives in meditation and prayer,

*If the door of my heart is ever closed, then
come into my heart by breaking the door
and do not go back, O Lord!*

*If some days on the strings of this "bina"
your dear name is not sung, then
please wait a little and do not go
back, O Lord!*

*If ever by your summons the drowsiness
of my sleep does not break, then
awaken me with severe pain and
do not go back O Lord!*

*If some day I make somebody else sit
with love on your seat, then, O my
eternal King, do not go back,
O Lord!*

CHAPTER II

POETICAL INSPIRATION

IN his childhood as well as in his manhood the tragic hand of death played a most cruel game with many of his people. When quite a child he was deprived of his angelic mother. This death not only affected very severely upon the boy's heart but also gave him a chance to have a direct communion with the greater mother—Nature for consolation. His father being a man of several public preoccupations left young Rabindra to the care of the trusted servants of the family but the boy looked forward to the service of some higher power for bringing him up. He very much liked to have the company of loneliness in the absence of the maternal watchfulness.

Much to his inner satisfaction this loneliness also began to be forced upon him. It is said that the man servant under whose charge he was kept, with a view to lighten his labour used to draw a chalk circle round the boy, whose boundry he was not allowed to cross. The servant would then disappear and to this circle young Rabindra was confined till he returned. Thus the curiosity and observations of the

future poet laureate of India, in his early years used to be restricted to the most limited sphere of the "tenfold locked" vast halls of the old Jorasanko House in Calcutta. He could, however, from his restricted world have a glance of a water tank, some grassy plots, a flowery garden and some lonely trees. He used to watch carefully the movements of all those who came to have a bath on the tank and studied critically the varied natures of mankind and the beauty engraved in the green grass, glossy flowers and the tall trees. Thus the confinement which came upon him as a result of the death of his mother offered him an occasion to ripen friendship with Nature and to have close acquaintance of the different traits of human character.

While giving an account of his childhood days to Mr. C. F. Andrews, he once said, "I was lonely, that was the chief feature of my childhood. My father I saw very seldom; he was away a great deal, but his presence pervaded the whole house, and was one of the deepest influences on my life. Kept incharge of the servants after my mother died, I used to sit, day after day, in front of the window and picture to myself what was going on in the outer world. From the very first time I can remember, I was passionately fond of Nature..... I had such an exceeding love for Nature, I cannot tell how to describe it to you: but Nature was a

kind of loving companion always with me and always revealing to me some fresh beauty."

In his mature age also the poet received several similar shocks in quick succession, which very greatly contributed to his mental make-up.

At the age of 41 he lost his wife—the most talented companion who had been of immense help to the poet in as much as she never tried to persuade him to be attracted towards materialism. During her illness, as a devoted husband, the poet forgot everything for the time being and concentrated all his efforts to provide the best medical attendance for her but in spite of all this she could not survive. In an article "Rabindranath at Home" written by Shrimati Hemlata Devi, the daughter-in-law of his eldest brother, we find a vivid picture, how devotedly he served his wife at her death bed. "Members of the family still remember," she wrote, "the picture of the poet patiently sitting by the sick bed, nursing his wife literally day and night close on two months before death finally released her from her pain. His constant ministering to her comfort was instinct with love and concern. Electric fans were not known in those days; I see a distinct picture of the poet moving a palm leaf handfan, to and fro, fanning his wife to sleep with tender care. In those days in affluent households it was almost a custom to engage paid nurses. The poet's house was perhaps the first exception."

In his extreme love for her the poet wrote the

following poem in which he gave a spiritual colour to his grief :—

“ When she still lived, then every gift
She gave me, Lord, I could repay.
That time will never come again
Her night is morning now.
You took her in your arms, O Lord,
And at your feet to-day I lay the gifts
That I prepared for her erstwhile.
For every wrong to her,
For every fault of mine,
I must beg pardon of you Lord, to-day.
The blooms of gratitude and love
Which she no longer can receive
I bring to you to-day, O Lord,
Though they were meant for her.”

Not these two alone but a series of successive bereavements the poet had to face. Within less than two years of the death of his wife, his daughter, the dearest of his children who had, for some time been a consumptive, breathed her last in spite of the poet's best efforts to save her. Notwithstanding the innumerable pre-occupations, he took her to Almora in the Himalayas for a change but the tragic hand of death took no notice of the poet's miseries. A year had hardly elapsed after his return from Himalayas when in 1905 his revered father Maharishi Devindernath bid his last farewell to this world. The poet was greatly aggrieved at the death of his father and with a view to establish his memory,

had a marble stone erected in the shade of two mighty *Saptaparni* trees, which marks the place of the meditation of the noble philosopher with the inscription

Tini amar pranar aram; maner ananda; atma santi.

He is the refuge of my life,
The joy of my heart,
The peace of my soul.

He had not fully mourned the loss of these dear ones when another blow came to him. His first son, "a very sweet boy," as he called him passed away. These cold and untimely deaths came upon the poet as severe shocks and left a mark upon his tender mind which later on affected his thoughts and his poetry. These emotional shocks saddened his life but matured his poetry.

Even if endowed with the best poetical genius one may fail to win the admiration of the world if his heart is not brutally pierced. He may write beautifully measured verses, the steps in his poems may be accepted as most appropriate and correct but the real touch of poetry which is born of pain will be badly wanting in it

Overpowered by these repeated bereavements the poet wrote two series of family lyrics *Smaran* ("In Memoriam") and *Sisu* ("The child") which though quite simple in expression give a vivid picture of the condition of his mind. In these poems the poet has tried to forget the painful memories

of his dear ones. These separations "compelled the poet to the reflection that one evening the sun will bid a last farewell to him, too, and that his days, too will end in darkness. He prayed that he might learn, before he goes why the earth summoned him to its arms, why the quiet of the night spoke to him of the stars and why the kisses of the day light transformed his thoughts into flowers; he begged the favours that he may pause at his last verse and complete its music before his life merges into the life of the universe, when he will learn his final destiny." From now onward the thought of death is ever present in his poetry.

In *Gitanjali* at one place the poet seems to have tired from the frequent visits of Death. He writes:—

"O thou last fulfilment of life, Death, my death,
come and whisper to me!

'Day after day have I kept watch for thee:
for thee have I borne the joys and pangs
of life,

All that I am, that I have, that I hope, and
all my love have ever flowed towards thee
in depth of secrecy.

"One final glance from thine eyes and my life
will be ever thine own."

In the concluding pages we have seen that the opportunities that came to the lot of Rabindranath were: firstly that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and secondly that

he inherited a widely respected family of intellectuals, reformers and sages who were well-known for their exquisite taste in art and literature. This splendid inheritance was followed by a number of repeated bereavements, which though most unfortunate to him in many respects had left a mark on his sensitive mind and consequently reflected upon his poetry. An equally great opportunity which came to him with his birth was that he was born in Calcutta—The capital city of the great province which has the credit of giving greatest intellectuals to the nation. During the last century this glorious city produced a large number of great men—men of high intellectual calibre, patriotism and sacrifice. During the early days of the East India Company Bengal was considered to be the most backward province and Bengalis were looked down by the Englishmen as "notoriously the most pacific folk of all Asia. Often it was said that if the British were driven out of the rest of Hindustan they could still maintain their hold on Bengal and the capital city of Calcutta. Englishmen used to sneer habitually at the Bengalis as a servile set, who would put up with any insult and contumely from the English themselves or from any of the fighting native races without the slightest attempt at retort or resistance." Their intellectual capability no doubt, could not be denied even by the conquerors themselves; but that was nevertheless

considered a mortgaged intellect meant to keep the accounts and prepare the balance sheets of a Foreign Trading Company.

These impressions, however the conquerors could not continue to entertain for long. "The cowardly race, as they were habitually called, these cringing sycophants, whose apathy awakened the contempt of their conquerors, suddenly shook off their pusillanimity and developed not an accidental one or two but a succession of cool, desperate, self sacrificing young assassins who reckoned their own lives as nothing, who flouted the white judges in open court, who mocked at the horrors of Indian prison. When they were condemned to death by hanging for the political crimes which they had committed, they went triumphantly to the scaffold, and were regarded as martyrs by their countrymen, and, what is most remarkable, by their country women."

They were equally taken by surprise when these "*Bengali Babus*," the clerks of the East India Company and the instruments of their administration in the country as they were commonly known, whose intellect they had thought was mortgaged and reserved solely for the company's accounts sent forth not one, or two but a series of illustrious politicians, lawyers, artists, scientists, poets and writers, who, with their stupendous achievements in every walk of life stirred the imagination of the most civilized nations of the world.

In one of the first families of this glorious land covered with distinctions and honours was born and brought up Rabindranath Tagore, the future poet laureate of India.

It is believed that many of the philosophers and poets who attained eminence in their after lives did not love to go to the schools and colleges and get University degrees. Doctors, Lawyers and Engineers are doubtlessly trained in the regular institutions but it is not the class rooms which produce the poet. Rabindranath's educational career confirms that this belief to a large extent is true.

The story of his school life was very interesting. The boy was sent to school but he showed no interest. School room was not exactly the place for a born poet. Nature was the best tutor for him. Efforts were made to send him to the most up-to-date academic institutions of his time but nothing whatsoever could lure a sensitive and a receptive soul. He was admitted to the Bengal Academy and then to St. Xaviers' but very soon it was found that it was a vain attempt to imprison a free soul. He disliked the very idea of restricting himself to the formal discipline of the Educational institution and his wide awake temperament refused to adjust itself to the dulness of the ordinary schools. While giving expression to the actual state of his conceptions at that time about the school the poet once

wrote: "It kept me strictly separate from all that filled my life, and I felt as unhappy there as a rabbit confined in a biological institute."

In his later life also he has expressed a similar idea of school life. In the course of a lecture in Milan he said, "I avoided all kinds of educational training that could give me any sort of standardised culture stamped with a university degree. . . . Being a truant by nature I had always refused to attend my classes, and thus having become a problem to my elders, they had decided to send me to England to learn under compulsion the language which according to their notion, would give me the stamp of respectability."

As is the way of Indian parents, his father made use of all his authority. The boy was threatened with severe punishments "but his resolute refusal to be educated stood proof against authority and blandishment and he was allowed to study at home."

It was expected now that the boy would show interest in his private lessons but this expectation too did not come out wholly true. He did not show much enthusiasm with his private tutors as well. His father had perhaps thought like bad boys he was avoiding studies but it was a mere illusion. The fact was that the poet took his lessons from the beautiful hilly tracks, grassy fields, flowery gardens and fertile valleys which represent the wonderful architecture of Nature; from sunlight, from the shimmering moonlight,

from the meeting of seasons into each other, from the villages and from the crowded towns and from all that he met and appreciated in the outside world. More than that it was from the general circumstances of life that he received his education. To bind himself to the existing customs was not to be expected of him since "his mind was at once too eager and too dreamy, too independent and too sensitive to fall readily into the conventional ruts."

All the expostulations of his father and his brothers having failed to convince the boy of the usefulness of going to the school, he was left free to select any educational career for himself according to his own choice. The boy felt greatly relieved at this decision of his father and took an independent study of Bengali literature. He took immense interest and ardently admired the lyrical songs of Beharilal Chakarbarty published in *Arya Darshan* and was a regular subscriber of *Bangadarshan*, a high class Bengali monthly edited by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the most famous Bengali poet and novelist and the renowned author of *Bande Matram*, the national song of India. Bankim Chandra was the celebrated poet and a novelist of Bengal. Though much elder in age he had been a contemporary of Rabindranath for several years. His language possessed a unique music and is described as "the sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose." Besides, he also studied Kabir, the great

mystic poet of the mediæval age. It was here at this stage that Rabindranath was inspired to write verse. There are many who hold the opinion that Kabir was the dominant influence.

*He is there where the tiller is tilling the
hard ground and where the path maker
is breaking stones. He is with them
in the sun and in shower, and His
garment is covered with dust. Put off
the holy mantle and even like Him
come 'down on the dusty soil.*

CHAPTER III

THE BOY POET

HIS father was an incessant traveller and generally took the boy along with him on his wanderings. When he was 13 years old the Maharishi thought of undertaking an expedition to Himalayas for religious pursuits. These magnificent mountains are held in great esteem in Indian life, not merely because they stand to serve as a splendid wall for the defence of the country; but also because they have proved to be the treasure house of Indian spirituality. India's philosophy, culture and art owe a profound debt to the glorious peaks of these mountains. It was in the caves and woods of their ranges, in the solitary refuges of their marvellous valleys, and on the snowy surface of their exalted peaks that the great Rishis and Mahatmas attained their inner lights and gave to India, what is her richest heritage.

During their visit to Himalyas while passing through the Punjab they had also broken their journey at Amritsar. They were greatly impressed to see the deep devotion of the brave Sikhs and learn their sacrifices for the sake of national honour. The Golden

· Temple, which possesses for itself a unique charm and attraction, attracted the father and son to spend there a few days. Like a glorious island the main temple surrounded by a spacious holy tank and echoed by divine hymns presented to the father the right place for his worship and the rays of the sun floating on the green surface of the water with fish playing and jumping and swimming in the tank provided the real food for the poet.

After a short stay of about one month at Amritsar they proceeded to their destination. The boy who was already fond of lonely spots and eager to have a communion with Nature got a precious opportunity. Amidst the beautiful valleys, surrounded on all sides with green grass and fortified by the large peaks of snow at Dalhousie the father and the son settled down in a mountain hut and set out on their respective missions. The father in deep meditation invoked the Creator every day and the son wandering among woods and mountains lost himself in the infinite panorama of Nature. Every fine morning he used to rush to some magnificent spring or a water fall and lulled by the murmur of the lovely cool breezes the young boy forgot himself in dreams and reveries. He entered into the life of the blades of grass, leaves of the trees and the petals of flowers and communed with them in the language "unknown". At night the twinkling stars gave him the message of some distant land, and the

furious storms swept away his soul to the domains of dreams and the evening clouds cast their magic spell on him. And this cordial communion supplied to the restless and hungry spirit of the poet, an abundant flow of poetical inspirations. During his short stay of four months, in the Himalayas under the spiritual guidance of his noble father Rabindranath received regular lessons in Sanskrit, Grammar, English and rudiments of Astronomy. It would be true to say that the knowledge which he attained in the open airs in such a short period, many years of toil in the school room could have perhaps failed to teach him and that it was on account of the spiritual influence of his father's personality that Rabindranath imbibed in himself the love for truth and independence which played an effective role in the future formation of his character.

He was hardly 14 years old when he came back from Himalayas. With this education and at this age no body could expect him to make way for himself in the literary field but every body was surprised when he began to write beautiful verses in Bengali at a very young age. The spark was there in him even much earlier but now it had begun to shine in constant brilliance.

In November 1874 *Abhilash*—"The Ambition") his first poem saw the light of the day but from 1876 onward his regular contributions began to appear in the newspapers, in the magazines or in book form.

The reception that his first poem received in the public is not known. We however reproduce a translation of the same for the interest of the readers :—

“ O thou, the enchanter of human mind ! thy path is uneven, endless and infinite with inns innumerable—Though we pass still we like to travel on.

Men charmed by the keen call of thy flute rush forth—But the more they move to it, the more they are lost in oblivion.....

They rush on, O mean Ambition to cling to thy hurrying shadows men after men with hearts full of suspicion.

Cheating, deceit and oppression are thy charming meshes that make them stay in the march and fall a prey to them like a deer netted by the hunter's flute.

Behold those inane groups of men allured by thy song of flute and spurred by thy accomplice hope dive in seas of sins for pearls to seek.

Ah Ambition ! that poor farmer enticed by you while ploughing pictures in his heart thy illusive fortunes of some palaces splendid and magnificent—stores of wealth full of gems and gold

or

Ah Ambition ! That poor farmer enticed by you, dreams of splendid palaces, heaps of wealth, gems and gold

But these illusive fortunes shatter at a touch of reality—(normal life).”

New poets and new authors have often to meet adverse fates. The verses that they write could find place only on their own shelves since well-known journals seldom agree to publish their works. But Rabindranath was possessed of a valuable opportunity in this respect also. His elder brother Jyotindranath owned a well-known Bengali Journal *Bharati* by name and whatever he wrote, was given publication in it. Although Rabindranath, in his matured days proved of immense help to the journal yet it will be true to believe that he owes much of his reputation to it. The boy poet was first introduced to the public through its columns. Its editorial appreciation on the one hand encouraged him to write more and on the other attracted the readers to his poems and articles. This journal had been the medium of his expression for over fifteen years and one of the chief factors which went to the making of a great writer in him. Even when he was in England he contributed frequently to its pages.

Kabi Kahani (the Poet's Story) was his first long sustained poem which was published in *Bharati* and was then independently published as a book in 1878. "The Hope and Despair of Bengali" was one of his first serious and considered articles which he contributed to the journal. His literary career is usually considered to have begun with the publication of *Bhanu Singh* ("Lion of the Sun.") This

“ was first of his works which evoked appreciation of well known poets in Bengal. In this beautifully composed lyric he has tried to reproduce the usual themes of Chandidas and Vidyapati the old Vaishnava poets with such excellence “that many a scholar was misled into lauding them as newly discovered masterpieces of Bengali literature.” The poem was published in *Bharati* when he was only 16 and came into book form in 1884.

On September 20, 1878 the poet sailed for England in order to study English literature along with his brother Satyandranath Tagore, who was then District Judge of Ahmedabad and was proceeding there along with his wife. The wife of his brother, throughout his stay with her gave him the care of a mother and did all that was possible to make the boy forget that he was away from his home. On their arrival in England they took up their dwelling at Brighton and Rabindranath was sent to a local school; but later it was realized that he should be sent to London. The headmaster at Brighton School was greatly impressed by the promising traits and the creative faculties of the boy. He always therefore in the class room or outside spoke very highly of him. One day he could not help saying even in his very presence “What a splendid head you have!”

In London he joined the University College, took some private lessons in Latin and studied

English literature under Professor Henry Morley. Once he wrote an essay on "Englishmen in India." It was not only full of information about the Indian affairs but also contained an account of the woeful British administration in India. His criticism was like that of serious political critics. Prof. Morley was greatly impressed by the genius of Rabindranath and asked his British students to note what he had written since many of them were likely to go to India in some capacity or the other. At first he stayed there with his Latin tutor opposite Regent Park and then with Professor Barker and Dr. Scott. During his stay there, besides frequent visits to the London Museum he visited all the places of political or literary importance and had interviews with the leading thinkers, poets and writers. The Indian people had heard a lot about the debating capability and the power of oration of Gladstone and John Bright. With a view to study them personally and see their parliamentary skill, he managed to have a pass to attend the session of the House of Commons

He returned to India in 1880 and took his dwelling with his brother Jyotindranath at Chandra Nagar, situated on the bank of the Ganges. The wife of his brother was very kind to him. She always gave him the care of a mother and Rabindranath also loved and respected her very much. Moreover she was helpful to him in his literary pursuits.

So that when she died in 1885 the poet felt the grief immensely. "The death of this woman, who was both, a mother and a friend to him, made a deep impression upon his sensitive heart."

*Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the
embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of light.
Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine
of various colours and fragrance, filling this
earthen vessel to the brim.
My world will light its hundred different lamps with
thy flames and place them before the altar of thy
temple.
No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The
delights of sight and hearing and touch will
bear thy delight.
Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of
joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.*

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CHAPTER IV

THE POET RECOGNISED

HIS stay, in Europe was not a very happy experience since he brought some most unpleasant memories from that land. In a series of letters, known as *Yurop Prabasir Patra* (Letters of a visitor to Europe) which were published in *Bharati* for the first time he has given his impression of English society., He had very severely criticised the English customs, and civilization in these letters In his autobiography *Jibansmriti* which was published in English under the name of "My Reminiscences," he has made a mention of these letters and put forth that "These were nothing but the outcome of youthful bravado. At that age the mind refuses to admit that its greatest pride is in its power to understand, to accept, to respect; and that modesty is the best means of enlarging its domains."

In his early twenties he wrote (*Sandhyasangit*) Evening Songs which were soon followed by his well known (*Parbhat Sangit*) Morning Songs in which "the poet gave exultant and tumultuous expression to his newfound sense of inner freedom " In his "Evening Songs" which he had completed at the banks of the

sacred river Ganges, inspired by the wonderful scenes which surrounded him, the poet seemed to have lost himself in his love for Nature. His "Morning Songs" was one of his key books, "an epitome and microcosm of his later works." He had written a part of this book at Darjeeling hills. In one of the poems *Echo* the poet takes to higher flights in the world of imagination in the pursuit of *Echo*.

"Thee, echo, I love more perhaps than anything else! Thou makest me confused and agitated, to thee is borne the wailing of my flute! Thee I love, hearing bird's song from thy lips, hearing the murmur of water falls, listening to the profoundly mysterious music of the grave and the song of the whole world! But why cannot I succeed in catching a glimpse of thee, though I seek thee every where?"

His Evening Songs won for him the appreciation of well known people and established his reputation as a "Bengali Shelley." One very interesting and yet an event of literary importance is connected with the poet's life with regard to his Evening Songs. In connection with the marriage of the eldest daughter of Romesh Chander Dutt—one of the greatest intellectuals that Bengal has ever produced and to whom goes the credit of reviving "national pride and interest in India's artistic and literary past", besides many other guests the young poet

was also invited. When Rabindranath went there and entered the house where the wedding was being celebrated, the 'great' Bankim Chandra who was also present, at once got up to receive the young poet and put around his neck the traditional wreath of flowers which he had received from his host, saying, "The wreath to him, Romesh; have you not read his Evening Songs?"

Before writing his well known Evening and Morning Songs the poet had also written another lyrical drama *Bhagana-Haridaya*—(The Broken Heart) in which he took the mournful view of life. While giving the actual state of his own heart in those days the poet wrote, "This period of my life, from the age of fifteen or sixteen to twenty-two or twenty-three, was one of utter disappointment."

He was in his teens at this time. This is an age in which the mental faculties are not quite matured. Even according to the universally admitted Hindu Code of Lord Manu, below the age of 25 one is not supposed to give any thing to the world. This period is regarded as a period for physical and mental development but the poet, as already mentioned even at the age of fifteen began to deliver the messages of love and freedom to the world. Before he attained the age of 18 he had written over 7000 lines of poetry besides many valuable articles which he contributed to *Bharati*.

Rabindranath by now had established his

reputation as a recognized poet in Bengali literature. A very large collection of his poems had appeared in the volume forms and in the leading journals. In every well known periodical his poems and articles were given prominent positions. It had begun to be believed that the poet's regular contributions in any periodical was a sure method to popularise it and increase its circulation. He contributed frequently to *Balika*—the well known Bengali Magazine published for boys. He held these views even in his younger years that to bring about a revolution in a society the transformation of a child's mind was quite essential. Besides this his contributions were greatly welcomed in *Parchar*, a high class monthly journal published by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. At this time the two Bengali poets developed very good friendly relations. Bankim Chandra was greatly charmed by the lyrics of the young poet while Rabindranath was attracted to his realistic themes, sincerity and freedom of thoughts. But unfortunately these relations suffered a very great strain when their views came into conflict with each other over a social problem.

Needless to mention that their differences were on the matter of principles and not at all personal. Personally they had still respect for each other and when Bankim Chandra died the poet was greatly shocked and specially came down to Calcutta to participate in his funeral. Later, it

was only Rabindranath who revived *The Banga Darshan*, the great Bengali Journal, which had ceased publication after the death of the gifted journalist.

In 1883 the poet was married to Shrimati Marilini Devi, a pious and gentle girl, who had been of immense help to him inasmuch as consciously or unconsciously she never tried to cause any obstruction in the free flights of the poet's soul. But as already mentioned she could not adore the company of the poet for long since she died in 1902 leaving behind two sons and three daughters. Samindra, her youngest son and Madhurilata and Renuka her two daughters followed in the wake of their mother at short intervals and it was only Rathindranath and Mira, a son and a daughter who were left behind to share the joys and sorrows of the poet in his after life.

The poet always avoided the turmoil of the town life and loved to remain a remote and an inaccessible figure. Country side, hilly spots or seaside were the places which he liked the most. In one of his letters written at that time he writes "The longer I live alone within myself, on the river or in the open country, the more clearly I see that there can be nothing finer or greater than the simple and natural performance of the ordinary duties of every day life." He often

used to go out of Calcutta on holiday trips to the vast landscapes where Nature in its beautiful form could fascinate and amuse him.

By the end of 1887 he had retired to Ghazipur district in U. P. This place is famous for abundance of roses and flowers. He was greatly charmed by the beauty of the place and in the midst of these charming scenes he wrote his well-known dramas *Mayar Khela* and *Raja-o-Rani*.

Three years later Rabindranath contemplated an ideal Bullock cart journey from Ghazipur to Peshawar by the Grand Trunk Road to study the varied people inhabited in the different provinces in India by mixing himself with them but his plans were thwarted because of his father's intervention who desired him to take charge of his family estate at Shelieda.

To take charge of a big estate was not a poet's job, he therefore showed some hesitation; but in spite of his unwillingness to handle the arduous work he could not escape from it. "The poet was just a little afraid at the name of the work, but at last he consented."

For four years he played the role of an estate manager. It was a great experiment since for the first time he came across the pitiable and destitute living of Indian peasants. He was greatly moved to see those poverty stricken "patient, submissive, family loving, home clinging, eternally exploited village folk."

In a letter written about this time the poet expressed :—

“I feel a great tenderness for these peasant folk, our ryots—big, helpless, infantile children of Providence, who must have food brought to their very lips, or they are undone. When the breasts of mother earth dry up, they are at a loss what to do and can only cry. But no sooner is their hunger satisfied than they forget all their sufferings.”

He took keen interest in their personal affairs, tried to understand their difficulties and helped them in the hours of their needs. He encouraged in them the spirit of co-operative help and brought home to them the necessity of avoiding the extravagance of marriages and other evils existing in their every day life. These were some of the happiest years of his life and also full of achievements. He completed a great drama *Sacrifice* and also a great novel *Chitrangada* in these years. The former has been described as the greatest drama in Bengali literature while the latter is regarded as “one of the summits of his works unsurpassed, and unsurpassable in its kind.”

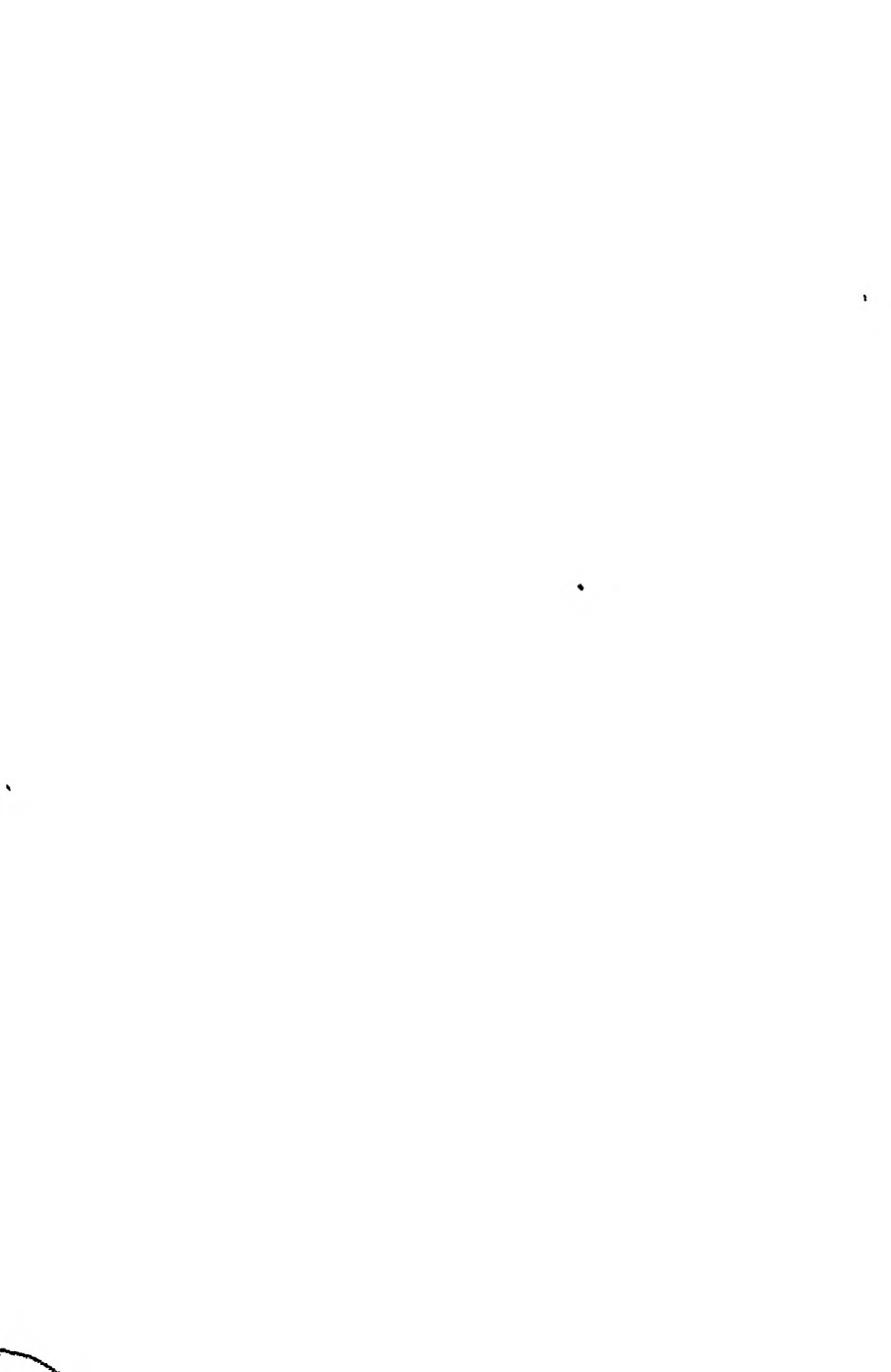
During these years he had also been the soul of “Sadhana” a new Bengali Monthly started by his nephew. He contributed innumerable poems, essays, short stories and articles on all topics and all subjects and made the journal great and renowned. His well known *Yurop Jattri Diary* (Diary of a

traveller to Europe) and his short story masterpiece *Kabulwala* also appeared in this magazine for the first time. This organ had also been his medium of expression in his controversy with Bankim Chandra and Chandra Nath Bose. But in 1896 "Sadhana—incomparably the best periodical Bengal has ever known" ceased publication.

At this time there occurred a great turn in the poet's mind. He began to take interest in the social and political affairs of his country. He wrote a "series of penetrating articles on some contemporary events expressing his indignation against the many manifestations of inferiority complex in contemporary Indian society."

It was only as a result of such a transformation of mind that he founded the Santiniketan Vidyala, participated in several social and political activities and later appeared in the role of a hero in the Partition Days.

*" Standing on the spacious earth,
I lost all fear and shame.
I realized that in this world
I too had a task to perform.
To the soil of my country I bowed
And said with folded hands
' Accept, O Mother, this whole life,
Which I consecrate to thee.' "*



CHAPTER V

SANTINIKETAN (VISHVABHARATI)

A confluence of the world cultures

WHEN Kagwa, the great Japanese social worker, came to India, Gandhiji told him "Santiniketan is India." Jawaharlal had also at one occasion remarked, "He who has not visited Santiniketan has not seen India." An attempt is therefore made in the following lines to give an insight into the working of such a great institution and stages of development through which it has passed.

Maharishi Devindernath—the revered father of the poet Tagore was a remote and simple figure and possessed a great love for solitude and meditation. To avoid the humdrum surroundings of Calcutta life he often escaped from his home and spent months together in the forlorn Himalayan Valleys. In 1863, just two years after the birth of his son Rabindranath, in order to avoid the every day inconveniences of long journeys he decided to find out a quiet place somewhere in the vicinity of Calcutta for his religious contemplations.

Consequently, he purchased a vast tract of land at a distance of about ninety miles to the West of Calcutta near Bolpur. It was a bare spot in the midst of an open country lying barren on all the four sides but the Maharishi's intense love for beauty and meditation brought about a complete transformation in it. He built a small house, erected a sanctuary, planted some mango and palm trees and laid a small garden.

It was a far cry from Jorasanko, his palatial residence of Calcutta but it was after his heart's desire. It gave him the peace of mind that he wanted so eagerly and hence named it Santiniketan (Place ("Niketan") of Peace ("Santi"))

The founder soon created it as a public *ashram* for the use of all those who wished to meditate in appropriate environment, without causing any offence to any other creed or sect but the place being far away from the populated area, could not attract many worshippers. For many years therefore it remained a quiet and remote place without any activity.

In 1901 however, it witnessed some change. Young Tagore who had by now become a famous poet of India begged the permission of his father to start a *Vidyalaya* there on the pattern of old Indian Ashrams, which of course was readily given and thus Santiniketan entered a new phase of its life.

During the past few years when the poet was at Shelieda, at the helm of his ancestral estate his

mind saw a great turning point. He was horrified to see the rapidly increasing westernization in the youth of the country and apprehended a great disaster for India's culture through the existing system of education and blind imitation of the West.

As a matter of fact he was greatly attracted by the old indigenous system of education. He felt it very strongly that the modern system of education, although possessed of great charm is absolutely devoid of reality and truth. Its sole emphasis is on the intellectual and physical side of a man and not on the spiritual side. In the course of a lecture delivered in America, the poet has given expression to the ideals which inspired him to start the school. He said :

"In India we still cherish in our memory the tradition of the forest colonies of great teachers. These places were neither schools nor monasteries in the modern sense of the word. They consisted of homes where with their families lived men whose object was to see the world in God and to realize their own life in Him. Though they lived outside society, yet they were to society what the Sun is to the planets, the centre from which it received its life and light. And here boys grew up in an intimate vision of eternal life before they were thought fit to enter the state of the householder.

"Thus in the ancient India the school was there where was the life itself. There the students were brought up, not in the academic atmosphere of

scholarship and learning, or in the maimed life of monastic seclusion, but in the atmosphere of living aspiration. They took the cattle to pastures, collected firewood, gathered fruit, cultivated kindness to all creatures, and grew in their spirit with their own teacher's spiritual growth. This was possible because the primary object of these places was not teaching but giving shelter to those who lived their life in God.

"That this traditional relationship of the masters and disciples is not a mere romantic fiction is proved by the relics we still possess of the indigenous system of education. These *chatuspathis*, which is the Sanskrit name for the university, have not the savour of the school about them. The students live in their master's home like the children of the house, without having to pay for their board and lodging or tuition. The teacher prosecutes his own study, living a life of simplicity, and helping the students in their lessons as a part of his life and not of his profession. This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind. Those who in other countries are favoured with unlimited expectations of worldly prospects can fix their purposes of education on those objects.

"But for us to maintain the self-respect which we owe to ourselves and to our Creator, we must make the purpose of our education nothing short of the highest purpose of man, the fullest growth and

freedom of soul. It is pitiful to have to scramble for small pittance of fortune. Only let us have access to the life that goes beyond death and rises above all circumstances, let us find our God, let us live for that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of things but of inner light, not of power but of love. Such emancipation of soul we have witnessed in our country among men devoid of book-learning and living in absolute poverty. In India we have the inheritance of this treasure of spiritual wisdom. Let the object of our education be to open it out before us and to give us the power to make the true use of it in our life, and offer it to the rest of the world when the time comes, as our contribution to its eternal welfare.

"I had been immersed in literary activities when this thought struck my mind with painful intensity. I suddenly felt like one groaning under the suffocation of nightmare. It was not only my own soul, but the soul of my country that seemed to be struggling for its breath through me. I felt clearly that what was needed was not any particular material object not wealth or comfort or power, but our awakening to full consciousness in soul freedom, the freedom of the life in God, where we have no enmity with those who must fight, no competition with those who must make money, where we are beyond all attacks and above all insults."

Greatly impressed with these ideas, he felt called upon to abandon his solitary life, and revive the decaying orientation and consequently the high culture of the great country. With these high ideals he laid the foundation of *the Vidyala* (the basic education school) at Santiniketan which to-day has developed into the home of the cultures of the East and the West.

Reminded of the bitter experiences of his own school life the poet's endeavour was to create an atmosphere of freedom and joy for the students. He himself joined them in their games, entertained them with his stories and made them feel that the rod of a teacher had no place in their midst and that they were all members of one happy family. He firmly believed that "a child's mind is like a seed which is intended to sprout and give a new crop, not like a grain which is destined to be ground between two mill stones" To the best of his efforts therefore he tried to create the feelings of trust and self-reliance in them so that without any external pressure they could develop their creative faculties and become true citizens in their after lives. No rooms were built for holding the classes, nor were any desks provided for the students. In the open air under the shadow of mangoe trees the students met under the supervision of the poet's own selected teachers with gay temperament, simple habits and high moral character. The poet's manifesto of the institution was that —

"Our ideal institution will be situated under the shadow of trees in the open country far from the turmoil of cities. The teachers will carry on their own studies and teach, and the students will learn and grow up in an atmosphere of peace and quietness. If possible, gardens and farmlands will be attached to the "Vidyala." The pupils will help in the farming operations, in looking after the cattle and in milking cows. In their leisure hours they will dig soil, plant trees and water them. Classes will be held under the trees and the boys will learn roaming over the fields with their teachers. In this way an intimate contact with Nature will be established not merely through the emotions but also through work and toil."

Again, at another occasion he said :

"The institution should be a perpetual creation by the co-operative enthusiasm of teachers and students, growing with the growth of their souls, a world in itself, self sustaining, independent, rich with ever-renewing life, radiating life across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies. Its aims should be in imparting life-breath to complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom."

It would be interesting to know that the institution which to-day is admittedly one of the greatest

cultural centres in the world with over nine hundred students attracted from all parts of the world had a beginning which was very humble indeed. Only five students were on its rolls in the first session out of which two were the sons of the poet himself. Gradually the work thrived and the institution grew popular and the number of students increased with great rapidity.

After his return from Europe in 1914 the poet realised that his international recognition had placed a great responsibility on him. He felt that "if we confine our institution within the local limits of the time and space of our country, it will lose its purity. The development of a complete manhood is our object and we must not aim at anything less than this."

He therefore thought of extending the scope of Santiniketan to the students throughout the world—to the East as well as to the West. This time he had also brought with him C. F. Andrews, and W. W. Pearson who proved of immense help to him in the realisation of his educational ideal. In December, 1921 when Gandhiji was busy in his non-co-operation scheme, the poet proclaimed the extension of Santiniketan Basic Schools into Vishvabharati—an international University with the objects:

"To bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research,

the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity."

"To approach the West from the stand-point of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia "

"To seek to realise in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres."

The Vishvabharati institution was registered as a public society under act XXI of 1860 with the poet as its founder president. The same year several new branches of art and learning were introduced in it and arrangements were made for the advanced studies in Buddhist literature, Vedic and classical Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and later on Tibetan and Chinese. In 1927 a department of Islamic studies was also added with the munificent " gift of one lakh of rupees from H. E. H. the Nizam of Hyderabad." A permanent section of Zoroastrian studies was also started by this time with the help of funds raised by Parsi sympathisers in Bombay.

Thus at present Vishvabharati is a great cultural centre in the world with more than half a dozen departments attached to it and students drawn from all parts of the world are being benefitted. It maintains to-day Patha Bhavana (School) Siksha Bhavana (College) Vidya Bhavana (Research Institute)

Cheena Bhavana (Sino Indian Studies Hall), Kala Bhavana (School of Arts and Crafts) and Sangit Bhavana (School of Music and Dancing).

The poet, besides his spiritual influence has made over practically whole of his property to the institution by a trust deed including the land, buildings, library and other properties at Santiniketan, the entire amount of the Nobel Prize, the copyright of his Bengali Books and the sale proceeds of his English books. Later, a department of Rural Reconstruction was also introduced. During his Western tour which he undertook soon after the Great War, a young Englishman, Mr. L. K. Elmhirst was attracted to the poet. He was greatly interested in the rural reconstruction scheme of the poet and gladly offered himself to go to India if he started such an institute. The poet had, in 1915 purchased a large plot of land at Surul he therefore availed himself of the offer of the young Englishman and founded Shreeniketan—an ideal village.

"Where the pupils experiment and pass on the results of their work to the peasants.' They work according to the most up-to-date and scientific plans of drainage, irrigation, breeding and keeping of animals, and tilling of the fields,"

The life at Vishvabharati is ideal indeed. "At dawn bell rings, the students jump out of their beds—four planks and three covers—to salute the Sun with a song whose words and music are by Tagore. Then there is a rush for the shower bath which flows

under the banana trees Half an hour later, in clean white robes and with their books under their arms in a square of cloth, the students walk towards the chosen trees where the professor awaits them. They squat in a half circle and the lesson begins amid the singing of the birds. The pupils interrupt at will to ask questions of all kinds In Europe such impertinence would be punished*, at Santiniketan it is approved. At the end of the lesson all return to their houses, the professor joining in the games which are organised on the way."

The boarding houses are not like the furnished hostels of the modern schools. The students live in groups in the scattered country side huts in the clumps of the palm trees. Each cottage is provided with the best sanitary arrangement and is managed by the pupils themselves. They elect a captain of their own to watch and work as a warden Independence of character and freedom of thoughts is the greatest characteristic of Vishvabharati. "Students live a common community life, dining in the same hall, playing in the same field, organising common social picnics, literary and musical entertainments" Practically everyone there is a singer. Whole of the day they spend in the open air, singing, playing, reading, walking and running bare-footed. If rain comes suddenly they do not run to their refuges but take "delight in going out with their teachers

*These impressions are by a foreigner who paid a personal visit to the Ashram.

into the midst of heaviest deluge and getting thoroughly wet."

There is no distinction of caste, creed or colour. Its doors are open to the children of the out-casts also who are treated on the same footing as other students coming down from well known families "the barbarous caste spirit and cruel religious fanaticism, the two evils which ravage India, do not exist at Santiniketan." On every Wednesday all the Vishvabharati institutions are closed. This is the prayers day. Early in the morning batches of students in their multicoloured robes gather for the prayer and the poet himself conducted the service. After recitation of *mantras* from Upnishdas he commented upon the text.

Vishvabharati has a magazine of its own, a library equipped with most up-to-date literature, a dispensary provided with the best medical arrangements, a highly furnished guest house and possesses a scouts troops of its own trained on the most modern lines. The poet had always been very keen in demonstrating the art and activities of the students. He generally led the parties of boys, and girls to give music, dance and drama recitals in Calcutta and other important places in India.

In short Santiniketan is a world in itself and the life here, according to Gaeta Foquet, a young Frenchman who had personally paid a visit and spent many days in the Ashram "aims above all at forming the mind on lucid, social, independent, generous, and modern lines."

" My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music."

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CHAPTER VI

WINS THE NOBEL PRIZE

RABINDRANATH Tagore, it would be true to believe was an international ambassador who carried the message of love and peace to the entire world. His effort had always been to remove the racial arrogance and create harmony and good will among the warring nations of both the hemispheres. Whole of his life was a ceaseless struggle against "the artificial barriers which on the ground of culture separate the peoples of the world."

He always took interest in the international affairs and whenever any aggressor tried to oppress a peaceful people he voiced forth his protest in quite a similar tone just as he did at the time when in his own country the forces of tyranny had surrounded the Jallianwala Bagh. "I feel as much for the Negroes," he once said "brutally lynched in America, often for economic reasons and for the Koreans who are the latest victims of Japanese Imperialism as for any wrong done to the helpless multitude of my own country." He preached the gospel of love and peace not merely to the people of India but to the

Western world also. With the exception of his first two visits abroad, when he went to England with the sole purpose of receiving education, in all subsequent tours he took with him a definite mission of interpreting East to the West. He tried to establish contacts with the leading thinkers of the different countries and represented the ancient spirituality and culture of India thus bringing together the two different cultures.

By the middle of 1912 the poet left for his third visit to Europe. By this time his own province had fully recognised his wonderful achievements and as an acknowledgement of his unique contributions towards the Bengali literature, shortly before his departure, had celebrated his golden jubilee. A great public meeting was held in the Town Hall, Calcutta, on January 28, 1912 to felicitate him. It was an unparalleled ovation. Men, women and children, irrespective of caste or creed had collected there to celebrate their national poet. This was for the first time that such an honour had been done to a literary man in India. This jubilation had a very good effect on his contemplated tour. Many of the Western poets who had come across his works besides, the profound beauty of his poems had also begun to recognise his towering personality and the over whelming influence that he wielded in his own country.

Amidst such pleasant atmosphere, in quite a happy mood he left the Indian shore but when he reached London he felt very unhappy. He had always lived amongst friends and relatives in quite a peaceful atmosphere but in that foreign land full of fashions and activities he felt himself desolate and lonely. In a state of disgust, therefore, he decided to proceed to the house of William Rothenstein, a well known English artist, who was known to the poet since the former's visit to India, when he had come to meet Abanindranath Tagore, the poet's nephew and an artist of international fame. While describing the state of his mind at that time the poet once wrote, "Every one seemed like Phantoms... .. Then it occurred to me to get into touch with Rothenstein." This visit although undertaken in disappointment had proved a blessing in disguise. Here he came across some of the renowned poets and writers of the West.

With his arrival at Rothenstein begins the fresh era of eminence and glory for the poet. Here, for the first time he came across W. B. Yeats, Stopford Brooke, Nevinson, H. G. Wells, Dickinson, Bertrand Russell and such other men of fame. It was during this visit also that he won over to him a great friend, C. F. Andrews, who proved of immense help to him and remained associated with many of his activities in his later years. They were highly impressed by Rabindranath's wonderful genius

and therefore became his most enthusiastic admirers. Yeats, the gifted Irish Poet was asked to see the English translations of Gitanjali. He was so deeply impressed by the remarkable beauty of its verse that he did not return the manuscript for several days and enjoyed its music again and again

It was decided, however, to bring out a special English edition of Gitanjali with an introduction by Yeats and a pencil sketch by Rothenstein as front piece. The co-operation of the India Society was sought in this connection who gladly took up the responsibility of publishing the book. In the course of his introduction Yeats wrote, "I have carried these translations about with me for days reading in Railway trains or on the top of Omnibuses and restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger should see how much it moved me. These lyrics—which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention—display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long." He further wrote, "These verses will not lie in little well printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life, or be carried about by students at the university to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and

men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God, a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth."

The splendid reception that this great "Eastern masterpiece" received in Europe was of a unique character. It is said that "Not since Fitzgerald's *Omar Khyam* won its vogue has any Eastern poetry won such acceptance." The *Poetry*, one of the greatest English literary journals, wrote, "This publication is, in the history of English poetry, nay, in the history of the world poetry, a memorable event."

Stopford Brooke, the great literary critic, who had come across a typed copy of *Gitanjali*, in the course of a letter to the poet said, "I send back the poems, I have read them with more than admiration; with gratitude for their spiritual help, and for the joy they bring and confirm and for the love of beauty which they deepen and for more than I can tell, I wish I were worthy of them." Maeterlick remarked that some of its passages "are among the loftiest, most profound and most divinely human, ever written."

Yeats was moved more than anybody else. He was anxious now to introduce the poet personally to literary personalities in Europe. On July, 19, 1912 with the co-operation of the authorities of *The Nation*, a well known English Weekly,

he organised a reception in honour of the poet in Tarcadero Hotel, in which well known savants, scholars and critics were invited. An address of welcome was presented to him on behalf of the English public; in reply to which the poet delivered a remarkable speech and made some prophetic observations. "East is East," he said, "and West is West but the twin would meet in peace and friendship."

Thus covered with fame and honour Rabindra-nath left for the United States of America from where he had received several invitations. The Indian public had perhaps thought that this was the greatest recognition that an Indian scholar could expect from a foreign country for his literary genius. The poet too, might have perhaps contented himself with the great ovation given to his works in a foreign land But this was not enough. A good fortune was also following him to his own place.

HIS Gitanjali had arrested the attention of the Nobel Prize Committee also. To trace its origin, this Committee had come into being with the death of Nobel Alfred in 1896, a Swedish inventor of dynamite and other explosives. He had during his life time made a large fortune out of his inventions, and before death had created a trust of £1½ million to provide five prizes annually of £8,300 each to be awarded to the following persons :—

- (1) The greatest discoverer in physics, during the year.

- (2) The greatest discoverer in chemistry during the year.
- (3) The greatest discoverer in medicine during the year.
- (4) The best literary writer of the year.
- (5) The man who has done the most in the year for the cause of universal brotherhood.

In November, 1912 one evening the world and the poet came to know that Nobel Prize in Literature had been conferred to Rabindranath Tagore. The judgement and honesty of purpose of Nobel Trust was perhaps never so much appreciated through-out the world than at the present occasion. The Pall Mall of London wrote, "The Nobel trustees have never fulfilled their trust more thoroughly than by their award of the literature prize to Rabindranath." Later the Archbishop of Upsala during the visit of the poet to Sweden in the course of a speech said, "The Nobel prize in literature is intended for the writer who combines in himself the artist and the prophet. None has fulfilled better than Rabindranath Tagore." Rothenstein in his well-known book "Men and Memories" complained to the English people as to why they lagged behind in acknowledging the contributions of Tagore, towards literature. Even before the Swedish Prize, he stressed, English people should have conferred some signal

distinction to this gifted scholar "I wonder," he wrote, "who they were, and I regret that England had left it to a foreign country to make the first emphatic acknowledgment of his contribution towards literature."

The poet was greatly congratulated by his own countrymen also. It is said that over 500 leading people from Bengal, on a special train went to Santiniketan and thousands of telegrams poured throughout the country to give their respectful appreciation of the poet's great achievements. To most of the people who had gone to congratulate him the poet replied with a little asperity. He was deeply pained that his countrymen had waited to recognise him till the West had acknowledged his poetry in the striking manner. He plainly told the deputation of the evident unreality of the demonstration they had got up in his honour. He knew that only a small percentage of those who formed that motley assembly had cared to read his works, studied to understand his message. He must have seen before him others who had hitherto refused to give him their literary allegiance. And he asked them bluntly "What brings you gentlemen, here to-day? You, whom I had failed to please so long, what have I done, pray, now to please you so mightily? It is not my worth, but the recognition of the foreigner, that has evidently worked up this sudden

outburst of appreciation. I thank you for your generosity; but excuse me please, if I refuse to get drunk with you over this gilded cup of foreign wine."

This "inhospitable reply" evoked great criticism but Bepin Chandra Paul, the great political leader of the time who was also present in the deputation defended him very beautifully. In an article in his *Hindu Review* he wrote, "No man of Rabindranath's position and sensibilities could have been less bitter under similar circumstances," and "the rebuke of his reply was neither undeserved nor undignified." He further wrote, "Rabindranath would not have been what he is if he had failed to administer this salutary rebuke to those who evidently looked up still to European appraisers for the determination of the intellectual or moral values of their national efforts and achievements."

On January 24, 1914 an investiture was held in the Government House in which Lord Carmichael awarded the Nobel's medal and certificate to the poet. The poet in the course of his speech while gratefully acknowledging the gift said that it was a "grateful appreciation of the breadth of understanding which had brought the distant near—made of a stranger a brother."

The Indian Universities, now hastened to crown him with academical distinctions. In December

1913, the Calcutta University, at a special convocation conferred on him the degree of "D. Litt." (*honoris causa*). Later the Dacca University and the Osmania University also followed Calcutta's lead and made the poet "D. Litt." of their respective Universities. The Government of India also in the next birthday honours list conferred knighthood on him.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held
high ;
Where knowledge is free ,
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
by narrow domestic walls ,
Where words come out from the depth of truth ,
Where tireless striving stretches its arms to-wards
perfection ;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
into the dreary desert sand of dead habit ;
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-
widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country
awake

CHAPTER VII

PATRIOTIC ACTIVITIES

ALTHOUGH this identity has been established beyond doubt that Rabindranath was more of an internationalist and a prophet than of a patriot or a politician, nevertheless, the story of his life would remain incomplete if his unique sacrifices for the sake of national honour, his stern devotion to the cause of his country and his valuable contributions towards the national awakening are not mentioned in detail.

The tender heart of a poet, it is universally believed, is quite unfit for the rough and tumble of politics. -- seldom likes to be cheered by huge crowds. -- rarely likes hypocrisy or diplomacy so essentially required for a politician. But in spite of all this the contemporary historian, while recording the story of India's fight for freedom will fail in his duty if he neglects the wonderful spirit of patriotism which Rabindranath Tagore demonstrated from time to time.

To a general observer it may appear that the spirit of nationalism was revived in the country only after 1885, when the Indian National Congress came into being but this is not the real fact. The

process of national rejuvenation had been at work for fifty years and even more before the Congress was actually born. The renaissance movement which made its appearance in the first half of the nineteenth century had in fact paved the way for a national organisation. Moreover, the western form of Education which was introduced with the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy the great renaissance leader had largely influenced national awakening in India.

Inspite of its foreign character, many young-men received the English education in India and also went abroad, for further studies. They qualified themselves in the best administrative education, realized their capabilities and demanded their share in the administration of the country. They became politically and racially conscious and their self respect and patriotism awakened in them the desire to see their country great and free. With this began the chafing at the Englishman's sense of racial superiority and his attitude of insolence towards the subject race. It was in these early years of national awakenings when for the first time the poet picked up his pen against "currying favours with the white lords " He wrote several simple ballads in *katha* and *kahani* to remind the simplest folk of their sacred duty towards their country. He profusely wrote and often spoke on the grand past civilization of India, delivered lectures on the Upanishdas, extolled the valour and

self reliance of Marhattas, Sikhs and Rajputs, and awakened in the people the desire to live like a cultured free nation in the world

In 1890 the thread of the renaissance movement came into the hands of Rabindranath Tagore. He was strongly opposed to the domination of any race over the other. He always stood for the liberty and freedom of all the human beings. Although he had been, upto this time busy in gratifying himself in the beauties of Nature and towards the attainment of literary heights nevertheless the fine instinct of national self-respect and patriotism was never asleep in him. He was as strongly opposed to the foreign rule in India as Gandhiji or any of the hot blooded socialists today is. But his method and plan of fighting the demon of slavery was quite different from what the present politician preaches. Just like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others he exhorted the people to cease their criticism of the rulers and drew their attention towards social reforms and education

For many years the poet refrained from taking part in active politics and contented himself with the service of the nation through his pen but he could not escape from it for long. His deep sense of patriotism drove him to active politics when the integrity of Bengal was menaced in 1905.

Lord Curzon, one of the cleverest Viceroy ever sent to India conceived of a plan to divide

Bengali speaking public into two Provinces. In spite of the united opposition of Bengal he was bent upon this diplomatic measure and created a new province with Mohammedan majority. Apparently this move on the part of the Government was an attempt to weaken the growing national awakening in the province. It, therefore, excited the public opinion not only in Bengal but in other provinces also.

At the very outset the Government intensified the policy of repression. Processions, meetings and demonstrations were banned and students were prohibited from taking part in politics. In order to terrify the agitated masses Gurkha troops were summoned in the newly created province of East Bengal and Sir B. Fuller who was then the Lieut. Governor of the new province actually threatened the respectable people saying, "Bloodshed may be necessary."

The best minds in the province were greatly upset. They found themselves menaced by the most tragic circumstances and found no other alternative but to make peaceful protest. It was therefore decided to answer the measures by an intensified boycott of the British goods and promotion of national Education in Bengal. Consequently (Banga Jaiteya Vidya Parishad) was formed to provide education on "national lines" to students who were thrown out of their studies as a result of taking part in the movement.

The poet, who had for long been planning the education on national lines thought that the time for his active services had come. He plunged heart and soul into the movement and was very soon accepted as its leader. He wrote innumerable articles and delivered countless speeches and thus inflamed the sentiments of the youth of the country. The songs that he composed for the occasions had a direct appeal to the hearts of "Bengali boys." So that "he became the high priest of the national movement with its trumpet blast of *Bande-Matram*, and one of the leading exponents of the new gospel of nationalism along with Bepin Chandra Paul and Aurobindo Ghose." In huge mass meetings he proclaimed without any fear or favour that the Imperial policy of dividing Bengal, politically or culturally was nothing else than an attempt to weaken the rising tide of nationalism in the province. There may not be any exaggeration to say that in this national struggle there was no voice more powerful and no pen more effective than his and that there was no champion more enthusiastic in the partition days than the poet himself.

To make the movement really of the masses he introduced a very novel scheme in the struggle. He announced the celebration of 16 October, 1905—the day when the partition was given effect to—as the "Rakhi-bandhan" day, which symbolised the unity of divided Bengal.

In this connection he composed his great "Rakhi" songs and also led a huge procession to have a ceremonial bath in the Ganges as a mark of fraternal Unity of Bengal. In a meeting held in the same afternoon he delivered a remarkable address before a very large audience in which he exhorted the people not to take rest unless partition was annulled. His "Rakhi" songs had become so popular that small boys, in their own miniature processions sung them most delightfully in their own streets.

The song ran thus *Bidhir Bandhan kathey tumi emm saktiman* ("Are you so powerful that you can cut asunder the God-made bond that binds us"). He could not however stick to this leadership for long since he found himself reluctant to go as far as Bengali Youth went in criticising the government. He laid much stress upon social reforms and education of the masses while the hot blooded Bengalis favoured the direct action. The students liked active participation in politics while the poet asked them to do constructive work and fight illiteracy. Thus vital differences began to spring up between the leader and the followers. The followers disagreed with the tameness of their leader while the leader disapproved of their hasty actions and petty squabbles. The result was that the poet withdrew himself from all political activities and resumed the peaceful atmosphere at Santiniketan "When there

surged over Bengal in 1905 the waves of an awakened self-consciousness and nationalism," writes Sir P. C. Ray in the Golden Book of Tagore, "he was found in the very forefront of the national movement, inspiring it with the soul stirring national songs, stabilizing the emotional excitement with his thoughtful discourses, instinct with the spirit of constructive nationalism, elevating the movement out of the rut of sordid materialism and blind race-hatred by the momentum of his Catholic idealism. When the beautiful 'Rakhi-bandhan' ceremony was instituted to affirm the unity of Bengal inspite of official fiats, it was Rabindranath who pronounced its "mantra."

"If Surendranath Bannerjee represented the practical side, and Bipin Chandra Paul and Arobindo Ghosh the passionate side, Rabindranath Tagore incarnated the idealistic side of the new Indian nationalism."

He was severely criticised for his sudden retirement from the political field and was charged with "Cowardice" by his own co-workers but the poet faced all the allegations with cool heart. He advocated "change of heart" and "inner purification" and justified his withdrawal on the grounds that a radical social programme was more beneficial than active political struggle for the attainment of real independence.

For some time apparently the poet avoided the active political work and devoted himself to the

development of his Ashram—Santiniketan, to the completion of some of his masterpieces and to the travels abroad but very soon he found that it was not possible for him to shut his eyes to the pitiable state of his countrymen for a long time.

In March 1908 there occurred a sensational bomb outrage in Muzaffargarh and a bomb factory was discovered in Manicktola. This was the first terrorist outrage in Bengal. Over 35 Bengalis were put on trial for conspiring and waging war against the King and for acquiring arms for the purpose. In the article entitled *Path-o-Patheya* ("The way and the where—withal"), which he read at Chitanya library he touched this tragic incident. Whereas he warned his own countrymen against "such fatal expression of natural exasperation" he also warned the authorities that these outbursts were the results of the policy of repression pursued by the Government. Although he did not agree with the violent method of approach to the Indian's problem yet he paid glowing tributes to the self sacrifice displayed by Barindra Kumar Ghosh and his associates in the connection. One thing of course which the poet could not help admiring was that with their daring act those youngman had wiped out the reproach of cowardice levelled at Bengalis.

*It was in thy hermitages that the first hymns were
sung.*

*Words of wisdom, religion, poetry, history, first
Were preached in thy forest temples.*

Thou art blessed, the eternal dispenser of good.

Thou dost distribute food from land to land,

*The Ganges and the Jumuna are the milk of mercy
flowing from thy breast.*

CHAPTER VIII

KNIGHTHOOD RENOUNCED

BY the year 1919 the poet had gained great renown. His works had won for him the admiration of well-known poets and philosophers of the West. Nobel prize and knighthood, a detailed mention of which is made at another place had been conferred on him and he was being celebrated as a Prophet of humanity every where, when the most crucial hour in her history faced the country.

Great War, had come to a successful end with the Armistice of 1919. The foreign rulers of India had come out victorious and the enemy had completely been routed. The people of India who had gallantly fought the battles of Allies in Mesopotamia, in Palestine and in Europe pressed forth their claim of self government and demanded the immediate repeal of all repressive ordinances that had been in force during the War. Needless to mention that the leaders of the national movement in the country had lent their moral support and actually canvassed recruits for Great Britain on their repeated declarations to admit India's claim after the successful termination of War.

But when the War ended, instead of any appreciation of their gallantry and sacrifice, an attempt was made to render into permanent laws the temporary repressive measures. The Rowllat bills were introduced in the supreme legislative council assigning powers to the police and the local governments to arrest, imprison, extern or intern any person suspected of being connected with any offence, the committment of which might threaten public safety. Presumably these bills were introduced with the deliberate purpose of putting an end to the national awakening in India. Gandhiji described the bills as "the laws designed to rob the people of all real freedom" and announced the second Sunday after the Viceroy's Assent to the Rowllat Bills as the day of national humiliation. He requested the people to suspend their business on that day, observe fasts, hold public meetings and lodge strong protests against the forcible imposition of the bills.

This country-wide protest seemed to have unnerved the government. At several places therefore attempts were made to forcibly check the demonstrations. The result was that shooting took place at Ahmedabad, Delhi and Amritsar resulting in countless casualties including numerous deaths.

Amritsar witnessed the wrath of the rulers in its most tyrannic form. Not content with the arrests and convictions of numerous political

workers General Dyer in full concurrence with Sir Michael Odwyer, the Lieut. Governor of the Punjab, entered the Jallianwala Bagh with contingent of armed military soldiers. It was a Baisakhi Day. A meeting was announced to be held in the Bagh. Thousands of men, women and children irrespective of caste or creed had collected at the meeting. The General entered the Bagh from the only narrow path and without warning fired 1600 rounds of shot. Within a few minutes the large gathering of patriots was reduced to a heap of dead bodies According to the official version the death role numbered over 400 and wounded over 1000. It is said that the General did not cease firing till ammunition in his possession was totally exhausted. He shot "well" and shot "strong" lest any body should come back and "laugh" at him.

*Mr Justice Ranken, a member of the Hunter Committee which was appointed to conduct an enquiry into the massacre of Jallianwala bagh in question to General Dyer when asked :—

"Excuse me putting it in this way General but was it not a form of frightfulness?" The General replied :

"No it was not It was a horrible duty I had to perform. I think it was a merciful thing I thought that I should shoot well and shoot strong, so that I or anybody else, should not have to shoot again. I think it is quite possible I could have dispersed the crowd without firing, but they would have come back again and laughed, and I should have made, what I consider to be a fool of myself."

The tragedy caused great indignation in the country. The history had perhaps never known of any great tyrant who fell so ruthlessly on peaceful citizens including a large number of children and women. People were led to recall the Afghan invasions of the early Islamic days since an analogy could easily be drawn between Timur's massacre of Delhi with General Dyer's massacre of Jallianwala Bagh. Gandhiji in his own way thought of leading the Congress in a struggle against the Government and the people who were most panic stricken were also prepared to be led in any struggle against the Government. Such was the nature of resentment which the Amritsar tragedy had excited.

The poet who was in close touch with the march of events in the country was also exceedingly pained at the high-handedness of the rulers. The desperate and cold blooded massacre of peaceful civil population shook him to the roots of his being. He at once rushed out of his retirement and strongly protested against the martial law atrocities. He made an immediate announcement renouncing his knighthood and informed Lord Chelmsford, the then Viceroy, of his decision in the course of the following letter :—

“Your Excellency,

The enormity of the measures taken by the

Government of the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent or remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification. The accounts of the insults and sufferings undergone by our brothers in the Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers—possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine as salutary lessons. The callousness has been praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings, without receiving the least check from the same authority, relentlessly careful in smothering every cry of pain and expression

of judgment from the organs representing the sufferers. Knowing that our appeals have been in vain and that the passion of vengeance is blinding the noble vision of statesmanship of our Government, which could so easily afford to be magnanimous, as befitting its physical strength and moral tradition. The very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised to a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous contact of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinction, by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings. And these are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of knighthood which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King at the hands of your predecessor, for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration."

Calcutta,

Yours faithfully,

6, Dwarkanath Tagore Lane. Rabindranath Tagore.

May 30, 1919.

By this act he had not only made a wonderful display of his patriotism and self-sacrifice but

demonstrated it to the whole world that even after a most woeful subjection of over two hundred years the people of India are still possessed of such a unique character that whenever their self-respect is challenged or whenever any attempt is made to humiliate her great people they consider no distinction too dear to sacrifice

Knighthood is perhaps the highest distinction which one could expect in India under the British regime. To claim such a great honour, like the poet either one should be possessed of a wonderful genius which could compel not only the attention of the world but of the Government also towards his marvellous ability or he must be an indispensable factor of the British Imperialism. It is a title which the millionaires, hanker after, the princes and officials love to have but just like the Derby's Draws it comes to the lot of the selected few. It is noteworthy that even fifty per cent. of the Indian Princes are not conferred with the great honour. But to the poet it had no fascination because he was a great patriot, greater perhaps than many who have courted arrests or undergone imprisonment, and more than anything else he was that fine specimen of humanity, who could not tolerate any injustice or arrogance done to the helpless civil population in any part of the world. To swallow silently the national

humiliation was not to be expected of him. He would much rather like to make sacrifice of the objects dearest to him than to accept helplessly a challenge to the national honour.

The poet was once again upset in this connection when an Indemnity Bill was passed in the Imperial Legislative Council in India in order to protect the officers who had taken part in the Punjab atrocities and also when the House of Lords, in a heated debate disapproved of the meagre action taken against the authors of the Punjab Tragedy and presented a reward of gallantry to them by raising huge public subscriptions. In the course of a letter to C. F. Andrews he wrote :—

“The result of the Dyer debates in both the Houses of Parliament makes painfully evident the attitude of mind of the ruling classes of this country towards India. It shows that no outrage however monstrous, committed against us by agents of their Government, can arouse feelings of indignation in the hearts of those from whom our Governors are chosen.

“The unabashed condition of brutality expressed in their speeches and echoed in their newspapers is ugly in its frightfulness. The feeling of humiliation about our position under the Anglo-Indian domination has been growing stronger every year for the last 50 years or more ; but the one consolation we had was our faith in the love of justice in English people whose soul had not been poisoned by the fatal dose of power which could only be

available in a dependency when manhood of the entire population had been crushed down to helplessness.

"Yet the poison had gone farther than we expected and it has attacked the vital organ of the British nation."

These are not the only instances when the poet was upset. In his later years also he was greatly perturbed even at his sick bed. A couple of months were hardly left for him to live when on June 4, 1941 he voiced forth a strong protest from his sick bed in reply to an "impertinent challenge" which a certain Miss Rathbone gave to the "Conscience" of India. In the course of a letter to friends in India she demanded the moral support of the Congress for the successful prosecution of War and appealed to its leaders to end the constitutional deadlock in the country.

While referring to the *satyagraha* launched by Gandhiji, Miss Rathbone said: "Yet now we are at War with aggressors, these leaders and their followers are doing everything in their power to frustrate the War effort not only by taking no part in it, but by clogging the machinery of the Government through their defiance of law. In effect, therefore, they are playing the part not of neutrals but of allies of the aggressors, increasing their chances of victory and so prolonging the sufferings of the subjugated nations"

In her letter she also tried to condemn the Indian demand and most satirically accused the leading Indian leaders including Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of exploiting England's emergency. She wrote :

" And how else but as exploitation of England's emergency can we view the revival of civil disobedience—abandoned throughout the years of the appeasement policy, revived precisely at the time of our greatest peril, after the fall of France had left us to face alone the future of blood, toil, tears and sweat held out to us by Mr. Churchill, was that magnanimous? And what, Pandit Nehru are we to think of your assurance that you "have loved much that was England?" What sort of destiny are you preparing by your actions and your influence for the England you have loved?

"One thing is plain. You and most of the leading men and women among your followers have some cause to love, or at least to be grateful, to England, for you have drunk deeply at the wells of English thought, you owe much to Western and especially to British teachers, men of science, sociologists, yes, and to British statesmen and politicians too, for it is over here that the great experiment of democratic institutions and liberties has been chiefly hammered out. One might have expected that all this would have created bonds of spiritual kinship. But seemingly it avails nothing to change your

over-mastering obsession with your country's wrongs
We do not blame Indians for putting India first
But in what sense are they serving her by resisting
the War effort? Suppose their resistance were to
prove the straw that turned the scale against us
and gave victory to Germany, Italy and Japan, for
Japan would come in the East as Italy did in the
West in time to share the expected spoils of victory.
Would that mean freedom and independence for
India? Writing in August, 1940, when to all but
ourselves the day of our defeat seemed near, Pandit
Nehru declared: " We are prepared to take risks
and face dangers. We do not need the so-called
protection of the British army and navy. We will
shift for ourselves." A rash boast indeed! For a
nation to shift for itself nowadays needs long pre-
paration, and victorious aggressors do not give their
victims time. They would bring upon India horrors
far worse than Amritsar."

The poet patriot regarded this letter of Miss
Rathbone as an " impertinent Challenge " to India's
Moral From his sick bed in Santiniketan therefore
in a powerful protest he gave to Miss Rathbone
"more than what she could have possibly bargained
for "

"I have been deeply pained," he said, " at Miss
Rathbone's open letter to Indians I do not know who
Miss Rathbone is, but I take it that she represents
the mentality of the average "well-intentioned"
Britisher. Her letter is mainly addressed to

Jawaharlal and I have no doubt that if that noble fighter of freedom's battle had not been gagged behind prison bars by Miss Rathbone's countrymen, he would have made a fitting and spirited reply to her gratuitous sermon. His enforced silence makes it necessary for me to voice a protest even from my sick-bed.

"The lady has ill-served the cause of her people by addressing so indiscreet, indeed impertinent, a challenge to our conscience.

"She is scandalised at our ingratitude—that having "drunk deeply at the wells of English thought" we should still have some thought left for our poor country's interests. English thought, in so far as it is representative of the best traditions of Western enlightenment, had indeed taught us much but, let me add, that those of our countrymen, who have profited by it, have done so despite the official British attempts to ill-educate us. We might have achieved introduction to Western learning through any other European language. Have all the other peoples in the world waited for the British to bring them enlightenment?

"It is sheer insolent self-complacence on the part of our so-called English friends to assume that had they not "taught" us we would still have remained in the dark ages.

"Through the official British channels of education in India have flowed to our children in schools not the best of English thought but its

refuse, which has only deprived them of a wholesome repast at the table of their own culture.

" Assuming, however, that English language is the only channel left to us for "enlightenment," all that "drinking deeply at its wells" has come to is that in 1931, even after a couple of centuries of British administration, only about one per cent of the population was found to be literate in English. While in U. S. S. R. in 1932, after only fifteen years of Soviet administration, 93 per cent of the children were educated. (These figures are taken from the *Statesman's* year-book, an English publication, not likely to err on the Russian side).

" But even more necessary than the so-called culture are the bare elementary needs of existence, on which alone can any superstructure of enlightenment rest. And what have the British who have held tight the purse-strings of our nation for more than two centuries and exploited its resources done for our poor people?

" I look around and see famished bodies crying for bread. I have seen women in villages dig up mud for a few drops of drinking water, for wells are even more scarce in Indian villages than schools.

" I know that the population of England itself is to-day in danger of starvation and I sympathise with them, but when I see how the whole might of the British Navy is engaged in convoying food vessels to the English shores and when I

recollect that I have seen our people perish of hunger and not even a cartload of rice brought to their door from the neighbouring district, I cannot help contrasting the British at home with the British in India.

"Shall we then be grateful to the British, if not for keeping us fed, at least for preserving law and order ?

"I look around and see riots raging all over the country. When crores of Indian lives are lost, our property looted, our women dishonoured, the mighty British arms stir in no action. Only the British voice is raised from overseas to chide us for our unfitness to put our house in order.

"Examples are not wanting in history when even fully armed warriors have shrunk before superior might and contingencies have arisen in the present War when even the bravest among the British, French and Greek soldiers have had to evacuate the battlefield in Europe, because they were overwhelmed by superior armaments,—but when our poor, unarmed and helpless peasants, encumbered with crying babes, flee from homes unable to protect them from armed goondas, the British officials perhaps smile in contempt at our cowardice.

"Every British civilian in England is armed to-day for protecting his hearth and home against the

enemy, but in India even Lathi-training was forbidden by decree. Our people have been deliberately disarmed and emasculated in order to keep them perpetually cowed and at the mercy of their armed masters

"The British hate the Nazis for merely challenging their worldmastery and Miss Rathbone expects us to kiss the hand of her people in servility for having riveted chains on ours. A Government must be judged not by the pretensions of its spokesmen but by its actual and effective contribution to the well-being of the people.

"It is not so much because the British are foreigners that they are unwelcome to us and have found no place in our hearts as because, while pretending to be trustees of our welfare, they have betrayed the great trust and have sacrificed the happiness of millions in India to bloat the pockets of a few capitalists at home.

"I should have thought that the decent Britisher would at least keep silent at these wrongs and be grateful to us for our inaction, but that he should add insult to injury and pour salt over our wounds, passes all bounds of decency."

The poet's life is rich with such events when the patriotic sense in him, irrespective of his allegiance to no political party moved him to thwart the rulers whenever any occasion arose. Though perfectly an internationalist he was intensely patriotic. His several utterances which he made more like

a prophet than like a patriot and specially when he was moved by the deplorable state of his countrymen, will remain to serve as a living monument of the poet's love for his country and will go on inspiring the people of India even in the darkest hours of their political struggle. Gandhiji, no doubt has written profusely on political affairs. Through the columns of "Young India", "Harijan" and his numerous publications he has most efficiently tried to expose to the world the sad plight of the people under the British administration in India. But being the accredited leader of a political party he is regarded as a partisan by most of his opponents and as such his utterances however based on truth or originality are seldom given the same weight which they should otherwise carry. Moreover the words of a political leader according to the western standard of judgement are always expected to have a touch of diplomacy or prejudice, their intrinsic value is therefore not fully realised. But the poet being far above diplomacy and politics and essentially of an international outlook his utterances have got to be accepted as the verdict of a Prophet in the world. It would be true to admit therefore that the service that Poet Tagore rendered to his country, the right sort of exposition that he made of the British Imperialism in India and the height of estimation to which he took the unfortunate country is unique in every respect. As a poet therefore if he ranks among the poet laureates, as a

patriot his place will be with the princes amongst them.

One thing more which remains to be understood, in this connection is that his position as a patriot in no way lessens his position as an internationalist. As a matter of fact his love for his country was the part and parcel of his love for humanity. He believed that no strong nation has any right to suppress the legitimate yearnings and aspirations of any other race merely because of their superiority in technique and material. Whenever he saw humanity in distress in any part of the world he always got up to voice his protest against the aggressor. It is a well known fact that when the peaceful civil population in Spain was being aggressed by the brute forces of General Franco the poet was exceedingly perturbed and in close co-operation with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Congress President financed the Spanish Republic to an extent which was beyond the power of a dependent and poor country like India. He was equally pained when the Italian Dictator forcibly trampled over the freedom of the poor, peaceful people of Abyssinia and cruelly bombed the humble and inoffensive citizens. The recent Nipon's invasion of China also received his unequivocal condemnation and the moral, financial or medical help that the poet rendered to the oppressed Chinese will perhaps

make them to feel his irreparable loss more than any other nation of the world.

The world sympathy and love that the poet evoked for the subjugated nations under the tyranny of Nazis is also of no little importance in this respect.

Under the circumstances therefore to eclipse his internationalism with his patriotism will be an act of great injustice to the personality of the poet. Just as Chinese, Abyssinians or Spanish people love to call him their great friend, the people of India feel pride in owning him as a great patriot. It is only in this sense that we have made an attempt to describe him as a patriot otherwise his position as an internationalist is far too greater than anything else.

How little I know of this mighty world. Myriad deeds
of men, cities, countries, rivers, mountains, seas
and desert wastes, so many unknown forms and
trees have remained beyond my range of
awareness.

Great is life in this wide earth and small the corner
where my mind dwells.



CHAPTER IX

HIS TOURS AND WORKS

RABINDRANATH like his father, was an incessant traveller and a great lecturer. During his life he had practically traversed the entire globe and at some places he paid repeated visits. As a matter of fact he had made it a special mission of his life to bring at one place the different cultures of the world. With the exception of his two visits to England, all his tours were aimed at this high ideal. It is not a hidden secret that towards the attainment of this ideal at many places he had to face the frown of the foreigners. During his visit to Japan in 1916 he was brought in the bad books of the Japanese Government merely because in pursuit of his laudable object in the course of his two lectures in Tokyo on "The Spirit of Japan" and "The Message of India to Japan" he had warned "Japan against the evils of militarist Imperialism, which were the 'sinister' outcome of modern civilization in the West with its selfish creed of absolute national sovereignty."

In one of his tours to America also he had to meet similar public disapproval. During his first visit, of course, he was welcomed in that country as a

great scholar but for the second time, sometime in 1917 he fell in disfavour of the American people because at the invitation of J. B. Ponds of a well-known American Lecture Bureau he had at several places delivered his well-known lectures on "The Cult of Nationalism" in which he had brought condemnation on the greedy imperialism of Western Nations

These lectures, which apparently aimed at bringing peace among the powerful nations of the West were characterized as: "Sickly saccharine mental poison" in the press. And when for the third time he wrote to the same Mr. Pond of the Lecture Bureau that he once again cherished an intention of paying a visit to America, the poet received a very inhospitable reply Mr. Pond in his cabled reply begged his forgiveness and informed him of the unfavourable feelings of the American public at large because of his repeated lectures on "Nationalism" throughout his stay in America last time. But the poet was not annoyed because he knew it that truth is always bitter. So even inspite of slight hesitation on their part to receive him he persisted on going to America "for they must listen to the appeal of the East."

He spoke this time in New York on "The Meeting of the East and the West" and impressed upon them that the power of spirit was the sole guiding light in the darkness of life and all the

other so called powers are mere farces. Howsoever he tried to smooth their prejudices over in his lecture, the self-centred sentiments of certain influential persons still came into action when he tried to raise funds for the Vishvabharati—his international university.

In China also in 1924 he had to face the attacks of certain sections of the press. He addressed two important meetings there. One of which was of Japanese people and another was organized by the Anglo-American Society. In the former he made clear all the facts attributing to Imperialist greed, which had come to hold even Japan, fast in its grip. He also stated how this current of greed's accumulation of wealth had been originated out of the Western nationalism and how Japan was being swept over in its flow. In the second meeting also he spoke in the same strain. The result was that not only Anglo-American and Japanese press but some Chinese students also expressed dissatisfaction over his speeches, because to them the Western civilization was the means and ends of their prospective dreams.

In England also he had, once to face cold treatment at the hands of English people when in 1920 after renouncing the special distinction of knighthood he paid a visit to the land.

Needless to mention that the ovation that he received at some places was also tremendous. " No

poet, ancient or modern, has been received during his life time with the honour and respect with which Dr. Tagore has been greeted, whether in the West or in the East." But it must be noted that whether faced with difficulties or disapprovals he always acted as the torch bearer of humanity and sentinel of peace and love and never deviated from the path of truth and righteousness.

He had the honour of being invited to all the civilized countries of the West in his life time and the privilege of receiving reception at the hands of well-known poets, scholars, statesmen and educationists throughout the world. In Paris he was greeted by Countesse de Noailles, the well-known French poetess. In Italy in 1926, he was welcomed by no small a person than Mussolini who warmly greeted the poet and expressed gratification over "this opportunity to see for myself the work of one who is assuredly a great man." In England he was admired by Bernard Shaw and others. In Norway he received a personal reception at the hands of her king. And in Egypt the meeting of the Parliament was adjourned in his honour.

. One thing more which is of no little importance in this respect is that he had refused the invitation of Canada because Indian labour was not treated fairly in the country.

In 1930, when Gandhiji had launched his Salt

Campaign and the Indian National Congress had been declared illegal the poet was there in London. In a special interview to the representative of "Manchester Guardian" he severely criticized the Ordinance rule of the Viceroy in India and characterised it as the "Beauracratie irresponsible government" and then soon had an interview with Wedgewood Benn, the then Secretary of State for India and placed the case of his country before him.

He also visited Soviet Russia and was greatly impressed by the constructive work carried on in the country. In the course of his speech in Moscow he said that a thinker and a revolutionist have much in common. No doubt the paths are different but their ideals are the same.

His visit to Iran is also very important. At the special invitation of their government in 1932 he took a flight in an aeroplane and was accorded a royal reception. His seventy-second birthday was celebrated there and the King, Raza Shah Pehlvi, personally participated in the function.

To sum up, he had most justly worked for his life long mission of interpreting East to the West and preached his message of peace and freedom in both the hemispheres.

HIS WORKS

Rabindranath's eighty years of life are not only covered with honours and distinctions but are also

fertile and full of achievements. From his childhood till his "last journey" ceaseless streams of poems, essays, stories and novels flowed from his pen, each one of which possessed originality and truth, which very few authors and poets in the world can lay claim to. He was one of those rare authors who have ever produced fine literature in two languages.

Full justice, we are afraid, may not be done to all of his works in this small volume but a mention of his topmost works at least is essential.

Gitanjali, *Gardener* and *Crescent Moon* are some of his masterpieces in poetry. *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings), in fact is a collection of his spiritual poems in Bengali, which the poet had composed during the days of his bereavements for the consolation of his own heart. He says "I composed them in solitude during my sorrow without any idea of publication. They were written for myself; but since I found them to be a spiritual help to others, I consented to publish them in Bengali. At a later time, on my voyage to England, when I was convalescent after serious illness, I began to translate them into very halting English." This is the first of his English books published in the West and it brought a great honour and fortune to the poet.

The Gardener and *Crescent Moon* are the next two series of English poems published immediately after *Gitanjali*. The former being also

a collection of spiritual poems and the latter containing simple poems about children and their sentiments. The next important books of poems are *Lover's Gift* and *Crossing* being the two collections bound up in one volume representing the spring time and the autumn of life. *The Fruit Gathering* and *The Fugitive* are also of no less importance. In the former the poet has urged mankind to "adventure forth leaving behind the desolate past," while the latter deals with the ancient epics and is a collection of delicate and beautiful verses.

Out of his dramas and novels *Chitra*, *The Post Office* and *Gora* are described as his masterpieces. *Chitra*, as a matter of fact, is the English translation of the poet's Bengali written drama *Chitrang-Ada*. "The play depicts the ideal woman, in her physical perfection and also in her spiritual devotion for lover's sake," while the *Post Office* "portrays a sick child, who sits at the window and greets the different passers-by while he waits for a letter from the king."

Gora is a long novel giving "a vivid study of Indian religious society in modern times."

Sacrifice is also one of his renowned dramas and is classical in form. It is one of those few plays of the poet which have been universally staged and accepted. *The Cycle of the Spring* and *The King of the Dark Chamber* are his two mystery plays

but they have also received wide acceptance. *The Home and the World* which gives a picture of "new India during its national awakening and upheaval" is also one of his praiseworthy novels which is read even to-day with the same zeal and interest. *Hungry Stones* is a collection of his short stories, which has also received unusual appreciation.

Sadhana and *Through Relics* are two of his first prose books published in English. In these works the poet gives "an account of ancient philosophy and religious teachings of India."

Personality, *Creative Unity* and *Nationalism* are his three most important books which touch the philosophy of human life. *Personality* is a collection of essays written in Japan and America in 1916 which contain "his philosophic ideas of human personality." *Creative Unity* is a collection of lectures delivered by the poet in Europe and in America in 1920 and 1921. While *Nationalism* is the text of lectures delivered in Japan and America.

Jibansmriti and *Chelebela* are two of his biographical works. They were actually written in Bengali. The former was translated into English by the poet himself under the name of 'Reminiscences' and the latter by Marjorie Sykes under the title of 'My Boyhood Days.'

On the day when death will knock at thy door what
wilt thou offer to him?
Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my
life—I will never let him go with empty hands.
All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and
summer nights, all the earnings and gleamings
of my busy life will I place before him at the
close of my days when death will knock at
my door.

CHAPTER X

PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

BENGAL has produced many poets, who enjoyed great popularity in their age but Rabindranath may well be held as the only personality who can claim to have influenced the thoughts and deeds of his own province. He has made splendid contributions to the ideals and aspirations of modern India and served the cause of humanity all over the world through the magic inspiration of his lyrics and philosophic touch to all human problems. "His name is today greeted with admiration, wonder and reverence in almost every part of the civilized world." His writings belong to all countries and all times and are distinguished for their high moral purpose and depth of insight.

Many of the western poets like Oscar Wilde believe that the function of poetry is to give joy. It should only appeal to aesthetic emotions and may not have any moral aim. But Tagore held quite a different view. To him mere aesthetic emotions divorced from ethical message were of no significance. And so whatever he said, he said with a purpose. His songs were always woven with the

devotional sentiments, patriotic feelings and here and there some revolutionary touches. In quite a short period he made a name for himself as a most successful short story writer, a dramatist, a novelist, a critic and a philosopher but his chief fame rests upon his lyrical gift which today forms an eminent part of the world's standard literature.

He took up some subject whether concrete or abstract, social or political, national or international and modified it in such a way that it turned out to be a picture clothed in the garb of divinity. All his attempts whether in the form of poetry or prose, written in earlier or later period, seem to have deep craving to understand the riddles of the human heart. He has touched all the aspects of human life and all subjects of human interest and at no place has he lost sight of his high ideal

In his private life he was a faithful son, an affectionate father, a devoted and a loving husband and a kind and considerate master. In his national capacity he was a noble patriot, a disinterested reformer, a great educationist and an ideal leader, while in his international position he was a divine messenger who brought to the world a message of peace, freedom and love. In short, in the words of Keyserling, he was "the most universal, the most encompassing, the most complete human being."

A tall, fascinating and impressive figure with his lyrical songs and eloquent expression he had the power to win to his side even the severest

of his critics. From his very youth the poet seemed to have a great love for simplicity of life and character. Small beautiful beard on his young face and long curly hair not only gave him a highly venerable appearance but also attracted the young Bengalis to his mode of living. In a very short time in Bengal the fashion of keeping long curly hair and "Napoleonic beard" as the poet delightfully called it, became most popular. Simple and yet possessed of a refined taste, "with much eccentricity and exquisiteness" he dressed himself. With the passage of time the simplicity increased and his appearance became so striking and influential that in his later years the personality of the seers of ancient India flashed from his face and "large numbers have been fascinated by the refined and well-chiselled lineament, which together with his silver locks, his flowing beard, his eyes full of mystic inspiration, and his long and loose robes, have recalled to their mind the vision of prophet of Juddah or of a seer of ancient India."

His poetry passed through several stages as Mrs. Sirojani Naidu the illustrious lady poet of India, while broadcasting the poet's death said, "In his younger years he was a great romantic figure. His poetry was ecstatic with the very lyric quality of his youth, the exuberant note of youth, the extravagance of youth was there. In his middle years, the rapture was somewhat stilled and a graver note came into his music. But in his later years, he

returned to something of the old ecstasy, mellowed, grown richer, grown softer, yet none the less it was something of the ecstasy of youth, for he lived with young people, he drew inspiration from their laughter, he spoke with them and renewed his views ; he spoke with them and renewed his dreams and what he gave to youth was a benediction and what he received from youth was an inspiration."

His philosophy of life like the *rishis* of ancient India is based upon spiritual back grounds. He loved the world because he had come with a purpose : to serve it, to lead it and to love it :

" One word keep for me in thy silence, O world
When I am dead, ' I have loved.' "

At another occasion he writes :—

" When a man does not realise his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison house, whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then he is emancipated, for he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born ; then he finds himself in perfect truth, and his harmony with all is established."

He stood for complete abolition of caste system. And in order to give practical shape to his this ideal he had flung open the doors of his institutions to the children of the out-castes. He has often rebuked the orthodox fanatics for their hostile treatment towards the out-castes. In one of his poems he writes :

O my hapless country, those whom thou hast
insulted—

To them shalt thou have to be equal in thy
humiliation

Those whom thou hast deprived of the rights of
man,

Kept them standing before thee, not taking them in
thy lap,

All of them shalt thou have to equal in humiliation
Again he says

‘ The very right of mastery is the right
of humanity—that is the greatest truth. Where this
truth is obscured by various *Mantras*, *Slokas* and
rules; where people are bound down by customs,
lest there should be any mistake in judgement;
where people destroy their own paths lest they
should travel far; that country is the greatest
slave factory and that country teaches disrespect to
one’s own people on the plea of religion.”

He was a stern advocate of oriental mode of
living. He severely condemned those youngmen
who were being blindly attracted towards wester-
nisation and forgetting their own glorious past.
According to him they are “hypnotised by the
cruel laughter of the senile civilization of the West
that scorches all green beauty into grey barrenness.”
Once the poet became a little furious and with a
view to awaken the self respect of Bengali Youth
wrote, “Mother, you have fifty million sons, they
are Bengalis, but you have not made men of them.”

He was a great admirer of music and was a musician himself. He has written over two thousand songs in his life time, many of which have been translated into all the cultivated languages of the world. He was an artist of world renown. Although he had interested himself in this art quite in the evening of his life, at the age of seventy, nevertheless he created wonders with his inventive brain. Such that his paintings were exhibited in Paris, Berlin and Moscow and were greatly appreciated.

He was one of those self-respecting personalities in the world who preferred to have every limb of their body cut into pieces rather than to accept humiliation in any sense or any form. And he preached the same gospel to the patriots of his country. In quite clear expressions did he tell them, "If you want prestige, if you want life, life you are to sacrifice first."

Non-co-operation movement according to him was a form of begging from the rulers. And by begging he says no country, nor even any individual has ever attained freedom. He once said, "The moderates of our country beg from them with folded hands and extremists beg with eyes red with anger, that is the difference between the two. The former wag their tails before the master's table, and the latter only bark. The moderates think that they are wiser and the extremists think that they are heroic. But lo! The cuffs from the

British fists and the kicks from the British boots fall equally on the back of both. The crumbs from their master's tables, too, fall equally for both and they get busy fighting amongst themselves over the division of crumbs. Thus they do not have the time to attend to the work of our country's welfare. Real work remains neglected. Under these circumstances, kicks from the master's boots are more precious to us than crumbs from his table. So even death is better for us than to extend our hands to receive gifts from such people as the British." In the course of a letter to C. F. Andrews he has tried to give expression to his convictions more clearly on the subject. He wrote :

"Let us forget the Punjab affairs but never forget that we shall go on deserving such humiliation over and over again until we set our house in order. Do not mind the waves of the sea but mind the leaks in your vessel. Politics in our country is extremely petty. It has a pair of legs, one of which has shrunk and shrivelled and become paralytic and therefore feebly awaits for the other one to drag it on. There is no harmony between the two and our politics, in its hoppings and totterings and falls, is comic and undignified. The entreaty and danger which alternately are struggling to find expression in the ludicrously lame member of this tragic partnerships, both

belong to our abject feebleness. When non-cooperation comes naturally as our final moral protest against the unnaturalness of our political situation, then it will be glorious, because true; but when it is only another form of begging, then reject it."

Again he says :

"With whom shall we fight? With that stone which has not been smoothed by the blood of Jesus. How can we conquer it? By meeting? By petition? By begging?" "Where the love exists," he says at another occasion, "there is pride in being modest and low but where it does not exist, whatever be the consequences, keep your heart open and straight, do not submit to meanness, shun begging and do not abandon faith in yourself."

His religion was the religion of humanity. He is known to be a vedantist by faith but he has derived all that is best in all the religions. He was strictly opposed to Sectarianism. "Sectarianism is materialistic. It never tries to build its tower of triumph with its numerical strength, temporal power and external observances. It breeds in the minds of its members a jealous sense of separateness, that gives rise to conflicts more deadly than conflicts of worldly interests. It is a worse enemy of the truth of religion than atheism, for Sectarianism proudly appropriates as its own share the best portion of the homage that we bring to our God."

He laid great emphasis on the Hindu Muslim unity, which according to him was an imperative necessity before independence is demanded. "Fight with the foreigners," he says "is absurd unless we set our own house in order." He always advised the Hindu majority to accommodate their Muslim brethren with open arms. He believes that the contribution of Muslims towards India's well being is not negligible; once he wrote.

"The Mahommedan has come to India from outside, laden with his own stores of knowledge and feelings and with his wonderful religious democracy..... In our Music, our architecture, our picture art, our literature the Mohammedans have made their permanent and precious contribution"

When perfect harmony between the different communities is attained he says the freedom will itself knock our doors. "Neither imagination nor dream it is,—but a truthful vision of day that is sure to come."

"I repeat it again and again," he writes, "that without wasting our energy in excitement, turn yourself from the frowning faces of others (British). As the clouds in the mouth of Asar come down on sun-burnt earth in abundance, so you come down among all races, all people of the country. Bind the country by a net work of welfare organisations. Expand your activity—so much

so that high or low, Hindus, Moslems, or Christians—all might congregate and reciprocate heart with heart. There would be governmental attempts to obstruct us by suspicion and enmity. But we shall win, not by striking our head against obstacles but by overcoming them gradually by perseverance." The poet was very keen throughout his life to see his country great and free. It would have been the source of greatest pleasure to him if the shackles of slavery had been rent into pieces in his life time but alas! his ambitions resigned him to death and his long cherished desire had remained unfulfilled. In extreme devotion he once wrote :

"This fear of man, king and death, this merciless exploitation, this degradation, this humility in every step, this chain of slavery within and outside, this sacrifice of self-respect at the feet of thousands, this shameful state—relieve us of all these, Oh God.

Allow us to lift our heads in the open sky."

The poet was entirely against the idea of students participating in the politics. He realised that even in the course of their studies the students can render effective service to their country. He believed in constructive programme and always exhorted the students to devote their energies towards the education of masses. In the course of a speech in a student's gathering he once said :

"The down trodden and the despised, who have become callous to insults and oblivions of even the rights of their humanity must be taught the meaning of the word 'brother.' Teach them to be strong and to protect themselves; for that is the only way. Take, each of you, charge of some village and organise it. Educate the villagers and show them how to put forward their united strength. Look not for fame or praise in this undertaking. Do not expect even the gratitude of those for whom you would give your life, but be prepared rather for their opposition."

Although the poet could not see for himself the administration of Soviet Russia until 1930 yet he had had a touch of socialism in his boyhood days when he was put at the helm of his ancestral estates at Shelieda. The pitiable plight of the semi-naked and semi-starved simple country folks greatly moved this born aristocrat. About them he once said : "The food must be brought to their lips or they are undone."

In one of his writings of those days the poet says, "I am very fond of the country-people—the peasants—those great, helpless, child-like sons of providence. I do not know whether the socialist ideal of an equal distribution of wealth can be put into practice anywhere, but if it cannot, such a provision of Fate is really harsh and a man is really an unhappy being; for if the misery of the world is inevitable then there is no help for

it; but let there remain at least some small loophole, at least some slight possibility, to compel the noble part of mankind to hope and continually to struggle for an alleviation of the misery."

He did not agree in toto with the Soviet ideals and conceptions but he was certainly a great admirer of the system which provided relief to the down-trodden peasants and labourers. The wonderful achievements of those people and especially their progress towards literacy in quite a limited period had always his warm appreciation.

To sum up, he was not at all a socialist in the sense it required a denial of spirit and God but he was definitely a socialist in as much as he was deadly opposed to the accumulation of wealth.

A word about his relations with Gandhiji may not be out of interest for the readers. Both of them are considered much to be on the same level by their countrymen. So far as the spiritual sublimity of both the distinguished personalities is concerned none may be competent to say anything for or against one or the other but it is a well-known fact that even inspite of extreme respect they possessed for each other there were vital differences between the two. The poet never concealed his disapproval whenever he felt some disagreement with his programme and actions. When Gandhiji launched his non-cooperation movement in 1921 he disagreed with it because he totally differed with him over the question of

the boycott of education. Even in the recent years, it is understood that when Gandhiji had refused to accomodate Subhas Chandra Bose, the great fighter of India's freedom the poet reminded him of the great blunder he was committing. But, even, inspite of all this he loved and respected Gandhiji greatly and 'Gandhiji also found delight in calling him Gurudev. "I differ with Gandhi in many respects," once said the poet, "but I admire and revere the man highly. He is not only the greatest man in India, but also the greatest man in the present day world." Gandhiji paid several visits to Santiniketan and was always received with great ovation. The poet fully recognised his spiritual values and when as a sequel to the communal award he had taken fast unto death, poet's was perhaps the greatest share to save the life of the Mahatma.

He has extensively studied the west and his conception about those people is therefore very interesting. Many of the Western people have come to believe that the poet was not friendly to them. His criticism of their ways and customs was prejudicial. But this is not true. He was a friend of humanity and more so of the subjugated, poverty-stricken and helpless people. He was a formidable foe of injustice, tyranny and coercion. He was an ambassador of peace and a messenger of freedom and love. He had the power to understand the human heart and was gifted with a straightforwardness of character. Without any fear or favour he has equally analysed individuals as well as the

nations, not with any hostile intentions but with the purpose of bringing harmony in the world.

"When the streams of ideals," he once wrote "that flow from the East and from the West mingle their murmur in some profound harmony of meaning, it delights my soul. I feel proud whenever I find that the truth which dwells in the best thoughts of India has also been uttered in a different language, in a different part of the world. The best in the world have their fundamental agreement, because they are pure in truth. And, therefore, it is their function to unite, and dissuade the small from bristling up like prickly shurbs, in the pride of minute points of their difference, only to beat one another."

If at one time he has condemned the Western nations for their mad race for ascendancy and power, at another time and with equally vigorous tone he has criticised his own countrymen if and when any occasion came.

Needless to mention that there came times in the poet's life when this bold trait in his character brought him the condemnation of not only foreigners who went to the length of defying his claim as a cosmopolitan but also of his countrymen who openly levelled baseless charges upon his personality. In this connection, it may not be out of point to mention that the Indian Ghadar Party in Canada during the poet's visit to the land, assuming him a reactionary knight had conspired to blow him up.

To resume the thread, he was an admirer of virtues and enemy of evils whether in his own country or in the West.

This is how the poet has analysed the West: "Smart and superficially critical, worshippers of self, shrewd bargainers in the market of profit and power, efficient in their handling of the ephemeral, who presumed to buy human souls with their money and threw them into their dustbins when they had been sucked dry and who, eventually driven by suicidal forces of passion, set their neighbours' houses on fire and were themselves enveloped by the flame.'

He again says, "India looks to unity, Europe to friction. To establish relationship with others is the aim of India but to breed conflict is the genius of Europe. Indian society makes room for all, whereas Europe protects society by ousting others. India is alone in work but shares with others in enjoyment while Europe is organised in work but alone in enjoyment. India respects man Europe respects work. India wants freedom for others, Europe wants freedom for himself. India's interest is to reach the goal, Europe finds interest in the chase. India's religion is comprehensive and intensive but Europe's religion is in the Church."

It was not at all with any sense of prejudice that the poet has shown the superiority of India over the West but he firmly believed that the spirituality of India certainly dominates the Western world.

"I love India," he once said, "not because I

cultivate the idolatry of geography, not because I had the chance to be born in her soil but because she has saved through tumultuous age the living words that have issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great sons—*Satyam, Jananam, Anantam Brahma*—Brahma is truth, Brahma is wisdom, Brahma is infinite ; *Santam, Sivam, Advaitam*—peace is in Brahma, goodness in Brahma and the unity of all beings."

If and when he condemned the West it was absolutely not due to any other reason except that their lust for materialism and their mad race for ascendancy and power had wrought destruction on humanity. He wrote at one place, "The furies of terror which the West has let loose upon God's world came back to threaten herself and goad her into preparations of more and more frightfulness, this gives her no rest. To the worship of this devil of politics, she sacrifices other countries as victims. She feeds upon their dead flesh and grows fat upon it—so long as the carcasses remain fresh—but they are sure to rot at last and the dead will take their revenge by spreading pollution far and wide and poisoning the vitality of the feeder."

And he justifies himself in opposing the materialism of the West in these words: "Very many people seem to think that I am always talking about the materialism of the West and setting it against the spiritual qualities of my own

people. I do not do this and my own people know it. I have known the West and have found there a deep subordination of spiritual thought in your civilization... .. My idea is that there is, as it were, a great planet dragging at the minds of the present age, a huge planet with its gravitation, detracting our thoughts and endeavouring towards a path which is not in the normal path of mankind."

During his last years the poet seemed to have entirely lost all hopes of justice from the West and more so from the British themselves who profess to be the guardians of civilization in the world. On the completion of his eightieth year he had made a memorable speech, which may be considered as the last of his prophetic observations and which will serve as a guiding star for his countrymen and as an eye opener for the rulers. Here are some extracts from that address:

"Born in that atmosphere and with my intuitive love of literature I had naturally set the English on the throne of my heart. Such then was the state of affairs in the first chapter of my life and then came the parting of ways accompanied with a painful feeling of disillusion when I began increasingly to discover how easily those who accepted the highest truths of civilization disowned them with impunity whenever the questions of national self-interest were involved.

"There came a time when perforce I had to

snatch myself away from mere appreciation of literature and contemplation of the great world of civilization. As I emerged into the stark light of bare facts, the sight of dire poverty of the Indian masses rent my heart. Rudely shaken out of my dreams, I began to realise that perhaps in no other modern state had there been such hopeless dearth of the most elementary needs of existence. How could I help thinking that it was India that had kept replenishing the coffers of the British people? Such travesty of the human ideal, such aberration in the mentality of the so-called civilized races, such criminal and contemptuous indifference to the crores of helpless Indian people I could never have imagined. I had associated the highest conception of civilization with the character of the British race which I had come to respect through their literature.

"That mastery over machine, through which the English had consolidated their sovereignty over their vast empire, had been kept a sealed book away from the reach of this helpless country. And yet have we not seen with our own eyes what industrialization did to Japan and how within a short time she achieved wonders? I have also seen how Japan's civilised administration helped to distribute among her own people the fruits of her all-round progress. I have also been privileged to witness the unstinted energy with which Russia was trying to fight disease and illiteracy. Her industry and its

application have helped Russia in steadily liquidating ignorance and poverty and abject humiliation from the face of a vast continent. Her people have not observed distinction between one sect and another. They have spread far and wide the influence of that human relationship which is above and beyond everything petty and selfish. Their astonishingly quick progress had made me happy and jealous at the same time. While in Moscow I particularly had one characteristic of Soviet administration as that was the pleasing fact that there was no conflict of interests on the score of Communal Award between Muslims and non-Muslims, a truly civilized administration impartially served their common interests.

"I have also seen Iran, newly awakened to a sense of national self-sufficiency attempting to fulfil her own destiny freed from the deadly grinding stones of the European powers. It is significant that her good fortune dates from the day when she finally disentangled herself from the meshes of European diplomacy. With all my heart I wish well of Iran, may she deserve well at the hands of Fate. In the neighbouring kingdom of Afghanistan there is much to be desired so far as her education and society are concerned. But the fullest possibilities are there. And that is so, because up till now she has not succumbed to the benumbing influence of any European power vaunting of its civilization. Thus

these countries are now well on their way towards real progress.

"Under the dead weight of British administration India remained at the very bottom—static in her utter helplessness. So great and so ancient a civilization as China, came to be corroded with the fatal addiction to opium. When we were about to forget the shameful history of how the British had seized a portion of China, we were painfully surprised by another event. While Japan was quietly devouring North China, her act of savage aggression was considered a minor incident by the insolent veterans of British diplomacy. We have witnessed from this distance how slyly the British statesmen took away the bottom out of the Republic of Spain, and we have also seen how a band of courageous Englishmen chivalrously laid down their lives for Spain. Even though the English had not aroused themselves sufficiently to their sense of responsibility towards China in the Far East, in their immediate neighbourhood they have not hesitated to sacrifice themselves to the cause of individual freedom. Such acts of heroism reminded me over again of the true English spirit to which in those early days I had given my whole faith. I do not even want remotely to think of the feeling of amity that then existed between England and Germany. What puzzles me is how within so short a period, its imperialist greed could bring about such tragic disintegration

in the character of so great a race. One day I saw the English as a healthy nation full of youthful vigour ever ready to come to the help of those that needed it, and to-day I see them prematurely old, worn out by the plague of evil that has surreptitiously robbed the nation of its well-being.

"In the meanwhile the demon of barbarity has given up all pretence and has emerged with unconcealed fangs and teeth, ready to tear up world and spread devastation. From one end to another the poisonous fumes of hatred defile the atmosphere. This plague of persecution which lay dormant in the civilization of the West, has at last roused itself to create havoc and desecrate the spirit of Man. In our present luckless, helpless and hapless poverty have we not already seen this world wide destruction at work? A mortal combat has begun between one power and another, and no one knows what it will bring about in the end.

"The wheels of Fate will some day compel the English to give up their Indian empire But what kind of India will they leave behind, what stark misery? When the stream of their centuries' administration runs dry at last, what a waste of mud and filth will they leave behind them. I had at one time believed that the springs of civilization would issue out of the heart of Europe.

And to-day when I am about to quit the world that stubborn faith has gone bankrupt altogether.

"To-day my one last hope is that the deliverer will be born in this poverty-stricken country and from the East his divine message will go forth to the world at large and fill the heart of man with boundless hope. As I proceed onward I look behind to see the crumbling ruins of civilization strewn like a vast dung-heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises. Another day will come when the unvanquished Man will retrace his path of glory, despite all barriers to win back his lost human heritage. To believe in the final and irrevocable doom of humanity is certainly a crime but I shall not be guilty of hugging illusion for reality.

" Finally I shall proclaim that the day has come when it will no longer be safe for the mightiest of powers to give vent to proud complacency. We must realise the truth of what our sages said.

" By iniquity a man may thrive, may see many a good in life, may conquer his enemies but iniquity at last is sure to overwhelm and destroy him."

Sorrow's dark night, again and again,
Has come to my door.

It's only weapon, I saw,
Was Pain's twisted brow, fear's hideous gesture

Preluding its deception in darkness.
Whenever I have believed in its mask of dread,

Frutless defeat has followed.
This game of defeat and victory is life's delusion;
From childhood, at each step, clings this spectre,

Filled with sorrow's mockery,
A moving screen of varied fears—
Death's skilful handiwork wrought in scattered gloom.*

* The verses were dictated by the poet on his death bed.



CHAPTER XI

HOMAGE

THUS we find in the story of his life and in his utterances and writings the glimpses that are quite adept for their contribution to the unfolding of the agitated thoughts of his countrymen and narrow nationalism of the West. He knew no fanaticism, no narrowness, no callousness of the rigid reality. If he brought condemnation upon the West in the course of his speeches it was merely because the West's greedy acceptance of wealth was giving rise to evil forces that distracted the universal harmony.

His religion was the religion of humanity and his community was the community of the universe. *Upnishadas* had treasured his brain and sanctity of Nature inspired his soul. The insatiable thirst for knowledge gave him an incessant flow of ideas and the worship of Spirit gave him the silent message of another country—the country of self—that has no armies and no kings—whose strength is a faithful heart and whose pride is its history—struggle against the evil forces. Even inspite of our best efforts we can-

claim to have revealed all the characteristics and touched all the aspects of his personality. It must be a handful out of the vast ocean. Not to say of anybody else, even the most closest and intimate of his associates Shyt Ramananda Chatterjee, the worthy editor of "Modern Review," has confessed his inability "that inspite of half a century's privilege of acquaintance with him, we can claim a very very inadequate realisation of his personality."

And the poet himself tells in inimitable words :

"Do not in this way see from the outside—

Do not look for me in externals,

You will not find me in my sorrow and my joy,

Do not seek in my bosom for my anguish

You will not find me in my joy,

The poet is not where you seek him :

You will not find the poet in his life story."

We, are therefore, simply content to say that to know him is to admire him and to worship him and to love him.

The drama which was enacted 80 years before in the Jorasanko House, Calcutta terminated at the same stage on 8th August, 1941, and the reflections and legacy which the chief actor has left behind will go on inspiring the hearts of humanity for generations to come. The whole drama is very well summed up in the following reflections of Mr. H. L. Kumar, a young poet of the Punjab :

"...The pensive evening air whispered the music of some rift of dawn when the morning glowed in its first splendour and the gods whispered in an unknown tongue

'The poet is born.'

"The morn breeze brings with it the pangs of some past memory

'O! Where is he who had filled his heart with sweet murmurings.'

But no voice was uttered since

The Poet is Dead."

He has passed away yet his spirit will illumine the soul of his country. "He will be for each of us and for all times to come, a glorious vision." Not only in Bengal, not only in India but in the whole of the world the like of him may not be seen for ages to come. And in the words of the Mayor of Calcutta, "Till the last ripple plays on the streams of the Ganges, till the breeze from the south breathes her last soft sigh over the corn fields" the songs of Rabindranath will go on enchanting the heart of mankind "in life, in death and in life after death."

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